

Spring 4-27-2019

## **Fifth Grade High Suspension Rates and Classroom Behavior Management: An Action Research Study**

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Yvonne M. Bell

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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Doctor of Education Program

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Fifth Grade High Suspension Rates and Classroom Behavior Management:  
An Action Research Study

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in  
Higher Education

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## **Abstract**

This action research study was designed to understand the causes of behavioral problems that led to an excessive number of teacher office referrals and school suspensions at a public school in North Carolina and identify behavior techniques and effective modern-day classroom management methods that could be utilized in the classroom to reduce this problem. The sample was formed by a total of 60 fifth-grade students between the ages of 10 and 11 years and six teachers. Data was gathered using parent and teacher questionnaires, school suspension records, teacher write-ups, office referrals, classroom observations, and video conferencing or face-to-face interviews. Based on the results of the data analysis and informed by the theories of prosocial behavior, behavior, and change theory, a behavior management intervention was developed and implemented for the fifth grade. Findings showed that, once the teachers learned and applied strategies to handle and prevent unwanted behavior, there was a significant decrease of office referrals, teacher write-ups, loud outbursts, off-task students, and disruptive behavior, as well as an increase of teacher confidence.

*Keywords:* action research, student misbehavior, teacher strategies, behavior strategies, classroom strategies, positive reinforcement.

## **Dedication**

First, I would like to give thanks to my Lord Jesus Christ who is the head of my life, and the author and finisher of my faith. I would like to dedicate this work and degree to my mother Helen M. McNair whom is deceased. She taught me that nothing was too hard or beyond my reach. She always thought having a degree would make my life easier. I kept pushing even after her death. I dedicate this degree to my mother who had taught me how through faith I could do all things through Jesus Christ. She taught me bible scriptures since kindergarten and even to this day I recite Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Jesus Christ who strengthen me".

With all things being possible, I would also like to dedicate this degree to my loving husband Demetrius K. Bell who has always been a motivator, a challenger, and one who encourages me to pursue what I desire. Demetrius supported me throughout this process by giving up his free time, cooking, cleaning, and attending to our young children. During this program I birthed two children, and I was on bed rest with the last child; even then he continued to push me to finish. Only God knows the love and support he has given to me and to our children.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Some time ago, people considered teaching a prestigious profession. At one time, experienced, well trained educators were glad to work for the State of North Carolina's education department. However, that situation has changed. The United States has an educational ranking system that lists every state by student performance numerically; the ranking system begins at 1 being the best and 50 being the worst in the educational system. Budget cuts and a change in state governor challenged the North Carolina's school system and its ranking dropped from 19 to 47 in four years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). In 2013, the North Carolina state budget reduced educators' salaries by 13% while the U.S. average teacher salary has dropped by only 1.8% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). After North Carolina state governor Jim Hunt resigned, the state educational system suffered a loss which resulted in teacher attrition, salary reduction, and loss of tenure (Hinchcliffe, 2016). These challenges have impacted the morale of educators across the state of North Carolina.

### **Context**

Public School 1 is in the Eastern region of North Carolina. The school district where Public School 1 is located has 10 schools and an enrollment of approximately 15,000 students for the school year 2016-17. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2016) classified it as being a rural school. For students to meet the requirements for free lunch, their parents' income must be under \$15,171 yearly and approximately 54% of the students in the county participate in the National School Lunch Program (Department of Public Instruction, 2016, p. 1). In 2015, parents meeting the free lunch guidelines in this county registered below the poverty line by 130% (Department of Public Instruction, 2016). In 2016, the county where the school district was located had 6,082 children who lived at the poverty-level and in low-income public

housing (Mitchell, 2016). Residents contribute to 36.4% of the poverty rate, compared to the 24.1% statewide (Mitchell, 2016). It is obvious that Public School 1 has a diversified low socio-economic community, which brings diverse types of educational, behavioral, and social challenges for educators to contend within the classroom (Law, Rasin, & McBean, 2014).

## **History**

During the school year of 2015–2016, there were almost 900 teacher positions available at this school district, resulting from numerous experienced, long-tenured, and well qualified educators retiring from their teaching professions; while others relocated to other schools (West, 2016). As a result of the teacher shortage, inexperienced educators, substitute teachers, and previously retired educators were hired quickly to fill teacher slots. Long-term substitutes taught in some classrooms. Unqualified teachers were inside classrooms, attempting to handle behavior problems that they have not been accustomed to deal with. Students' classroom misconduct continued to rise due to the repeated employment of underqualified educators who are not properly trained or experienced to intervene when classroom disruption occurred (Block, 2014).

As a result, Public School 1 experienced problems with a high number of student suspensions and behavior referrals. In the school year 2015–2016, school authorities suspended 1,000 students away from school for one to three days (North Carolina Public Schools, 2017). Short-term suspensions were issued for non-threatening, nonviolent, and minor rule infractions; while the long-term suspensions were restrictions in which the student was not allowed on campus for a period of four days or longer. During the academic school year of 2016–2017, Public School 1 had a little over 4,000 long-term suspensions of which only 28 were reported to be as a result of violent behavior (North Carolina Public Schools, 2017).



School suspensions were a result of teacher write-ups and office referrals; the write-ups and office referrals were a consequence of negative student behavior. In some instances, the adverse student behavior leads to teacher resignations at a school (Block, 2014). Due to the incidence of students' negative behavior, in-school suspension at Public School 1 was no longer for one period or one hour after-school, and the school hired a full-time licensed teacher who worked to manage the in-school suspension. The time-out method of in-school suspension (ISS) increased, so that the suspension classroom was as full as a regular classroom; each period students were turned away because there was not enough room to accommodate all written-up students. As a result, some students were then given an office referral. Once that happened, students reported to the office and the administrator then had the options of either giving a documented additional warning or suspending the student from school.

### **Conceptual Framework for the Problem**

Change theory is defined as the rejection of a specific learned behavior and its consequent replacement with new learned behavior (NCSP, 2016). It is important for educators to understand how change occurs in order to effectively motivate positive change, and to prevent negative changes from occurring in the classroom. In education, the change may begin with the students' behavior and how the educators understand it (Bele, Bodhare, Valsangkar, & Saraf, 2013). Change must occur with how educators handle behavior, so the classroom behavior can be managed. Once the change theory is activated, the change process can begin; then gradually the classroom tone will change as well as the educators' attitude toward the school system (Edrisinha, O'Reilly, Sigafos, Lancioni, & Choi, 2011). Hutt (2017) suggests that teachers can motivate and promote the well-being of students, which is known as prosocial behavior. Henderson and McClinton (2016) stated that children from low social-economic backgrounds

stand a higher risk of being socially challenged and may have problems interacting with others in a positive manner; which in turn leaves the classroom highly susceptible to interruptions due to disruptive behavior. During these distracting instances, teachers have to direct their attention to the disruptive child rather than focus on teaching. As a result, they lose valuable instruction time, forcing the teacher to hurry through the lesson to stay on schedule as directed by the school curriculum; which in turn decreases the opportunity for the teacher to verify academic content comprehension before moving on to the proceeding lesson (Henderson and McClinton, 2016). Change is important in the classroom, but in order to have purposeful change, teachers need to understand the social behavior theory (NCSP, 2016).

Social behavior theory behavior is with the interaction, and responses between people that includes verbal and non-verbal communication (Dobson, 1970). Social behavior can be viewed behavior or response to an individual's environment or situational factors. Teachers who are knowledgeable about social behavior theory and able to implement it may help change students' behavior. Educators can also use positive reinforcement to shape and correct students' behavior (McLeod, 2015). They must understand each student's background, home life, and how low- social economic challenges affect their students' behavior as well as their thinking processes (Majid, 2016).

### **Statement of the Problem**

In 2016–2017, Public School 1 had 1,000 nonviolent fifth-grade student suspensions, which interfered in the educational process for those students (North Carolina Public Schools, 2017). It seemed that fifth-grade teachers used office referrals and suspensions as a behavior management technique for their classrooms and that they were struggling to properly manage their classrooms. Focusing on fifth graders was an attempt to provide intervention for students

prior to them entering the sixth grade. Sixth graders in middle schools have more behavioral problems than their peers in elementary, but if the problem is addressed early, the potential behavior problems can be prevented (Oliver, 2011).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this action research study was to identify behavior techniques and effective modern-day classroom management methods that could be used in classrooms with high office referrals and in school suspensions. This study was designed to understand what was causing the behavioral problems that were leading up to teacher office referrals and in-school suspensions. The plan of this study was to determine the problem and provide applicable solutions to decrease student suspensions and referrals as well as support teachers in their behavior management strategies in the classroom.

### **Research Questions**

This study will address the following questions:

How do fifth-grade teachers describe their experiences with classroom management at an elementary school with high principal referral and suspension rates?

1. What classroom management strategies can fifth-grade teachers at Public School 1 use to decrease principal referral and student suspension rates?
2. What behavioral techniques can be implemented to decrease behavioral problems at the fifth-grade level at Public School 1?
3. What can fifth-grade educators do to bridge the gap between theory and practice in behavior management?

### **Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study**

In schools today, there is a gap between theory and practice. Educators graduate from college with the understanding that students are going to behave, learn, and respond like the student models that they have learned about. The students that educators are teaching today are not the same students that the educators have learned about. Societal trends have shaped students' behavioral changes and it is challenging for teachers to teach effectively when the student models were based on the 16th century classroom (Shaw, 2016). Educators today are dealing with the 21st century students, including the millennial generation.

Due to the constant behavior problems, educators have left the public-school system and there is an increase in the number of substitute teachers and inexperienced teachers in classrooms (Block, 2014). Shifting classroom behavior may help decrease the stress levels of the teachers and possibly the number of office referrals and student suspensions (Shaw, 2016). Learning effective discipline techniques will help change the classroom tone, keep a healthy staff morale, and diminish future teacher attrition (Bele et al., 2013). There is not one magic formula or technique that works for all children or solve all the behavior problems at one time (Metzeger, 2002). Once the teachers learn how to effectively incorporate and apply classroom management, the focus can be centered on the student learning (Webster, 2017).

### **Definition of Terms**

The terms defined below are used throughout this paper.

*Action research:* An analytical research method designed to diagnose organizational problems or weakness to help educators develop practical solution to address them ("Action research", 2016).

*Applied behavior analysis (ABA):* A research-based therapeutic system based on

Behaviorism (the science of behavior), which was first defined by B.F. Skinner (“Applied behavior analysis”, 2017).

*Behavior:* is the manner of conducting oneself (“Behavior”, 2017).

*Classroom management:* refers to the methods and strategies an educator uses to maintain a classroom environment that is conducive to student success and learning (“Classroom management”, 2016).

*Disruptive behavior:* is the behavior that negatively affects teaching and learning in a classroom environment (Webster, 2017).

*Environment:* refers to the circumstances, objects or conditions by which one is surrounded (Oxford University Press, 2016).

*Intervention:* is a process or procedure imitated and maintained to support students and families regarding improved attendance (Oxford University Press, 2016).

*Misbehavior:* is something that happens as a result of a particular action or set of conditions (Oxford University Press, 2016).

*Observation:* is the action or process of observing something or someone carefully or in order to gain information (Oxford University Press, 2016).

*Procedure:* is to communicate consistent expectations for behaviors thoroughly (Bushwell, 2005).

*Qualitative coding:* is labeling qualitative data to indicate patterns or themes that emerge from data analysis (Oxford University Press, 2016).

*Reward:* is a thing given in recognition of one's service, effort, or achievement (Oxford University Press, 2016).

*Research-based practice:* is a treatment to approach an intervention or a service that has been researched and shown to make a positive difference for subjects (Association for Children Mental Health, 2004).

*Rule:* refers to the communication of expectations or standards, work belong, and respect (Hunt, 2016).

*Student attitude:* is the student predisposition to react or respond positively or negatively toward the educational environment, in this study with particular regard to misbehavior (Hunt, 2016)

*Student suspension:* refers to the temporary removal of a student from school or to the action of putting him or her under the supervision of a school authority (Department of Public Instruction, 2016).

*Office referral:* occurs when a teacher formally documents students' behavior and request for students to been seen by administrator (Department of Public Instruction, 2016).

*Teacher write-up:* is the removal of a student from class to an alternative setting for a period of time, while still allowing him or her to attend school and complete their work (Department of Public Instruction, 2016).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

#### **Assumptions**

In this action research project, the researcher made several assumptions once she saw the suspension rates on the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction website (North Carolina Public Schools, 2017). The researcher assumed that the teachers at Public School 1 would be glad to participate and could learn something that would help them reduce suspension referrals. She also thought that this study would have relevance and potential for impacting teachers.

Therefore, there was the expectation that the teachers would be willing to respond honestly and share their professional experiences. It was also a pre-conceived expectation that any administrator would give permission and support their staff in participating in a study that focuses on problematic areas.

Another assumption was that student classroom violations, and not school policy violations, were the basis of administrative decision for suspensions. The North Carolina Department Public Instruction (2016) online suspension data showed that office referrals were often written for nonserious infractions. This could be an indicator of a potential problem with routine discipline or classroom behavior management. Hildebrand and Arndt (2016) suggest that classroom management decisions have twice the impact on student achievement than policies. Hunt (2016) confirms that, if teachers continue to respond inappropriately to children's behavior, children will be encouraged to behave negatively.

### **Limitations**

As with all studies, this study had limitations. One limitation was the small sample size; this was due to the low student enrollment of fifth graders and the age criteria I established for the study; only students that were aged between 10 and 12 could participate. The sample was drawn from one local school within the school district, which could affect the reliability and transferability of the findings. The project timeline was another limitation in this study; ideally the study should have been conducted for a full school year to monitor the behavior of the students for a longer period of time after the behavior management techniques were implemented but the researcher was on a limited schedule.

## **Delimitations**

The researcher rejected mixed methods, and quantitative framework because qualitative research is most often used to study people, while quantitative analysis typically measures the frequency or total of something (Huberman, Miles, & Saldaña, 2014). This action research was focused on improving classroom management techniques in order to decrease the number of office referrals, teacher write-ups, and suspensions. Fifth-graders had the highest office referrals, suspension rate, teacher write-ups in Public School 1, therefore the researcher excluded other grade levels. The student sample included 60 fifth-grade students and six fifth-grade teachers. Therefore, the results or findings of this study will be restricted for the characteristics of the particular site studied. The site had kindergarten through eighth grade, but only students that were between the ages of 10–12 participated in the study. Students that were 13-years-old in the fifth-grade were excluded in the study because those students would be experiencing puberty, and their maturity level would reflect more of the teenager stages verses pre-teen stages. However, the researcher did not take in account that there could have been a few fifth-graders who were 12-years-old that could have been experiencing early puberty.

## **Chapter Summary**

This action research study is presented into five chapters. The first chapter explained the background of the research study, conceptual framework, and the context of the research site. It included the study significance, nature, assumptions, and limitations. The relationship between student behavior and classroom management was the focus of the background, context, and conceptual framework of the study; bringing together what the behavior specialists and child psychologists have researched in the past as related to behavior management in an educational setting. The research problem was identified clearly outlining the reasons why the problem



needed to be addressed at this school research site. The researcher intended to demonstrate educators and administrators about how the action research can help others understand student behavior within a classroom setting. An overview of the design of the study is presented and definitions are included to provide a greater understanding from the researcher's perspective.

The remainder of this manuscript includes Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5. A review of the related literature is revealed in Chapter 2, in which the researcher identifies, reflects, describes, and evaluates studies that relate to the study's topic, procedures, and method. Chapter 3 describes data collection, instruments, operation of variables, data analysis procedures, limitations of the research design, validity, expected findings, and ethical issues of the research design. Chapter 4 presents a summary of the results while Chapter 5 centers on discussing the results, as they relate to the review of literature and limitations. It also includes implications of the results for theory and practice as well as recommendations for future research.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Motivated by the need to improve classroom management and change negative behavior in individuals, many books, articles, and research studies were reviewed to understand the behavioral theories, as well as modern day practices of effective classroom management. This chapter includes a review of numerous scholarly sources offering in-depth information on classroom management and student behavior. Sources were selected in various formats, including peer-reviewed journals, dissertations, academic websites, and textbooks. Scholarly electronic sources were used, such as ProQuest Dissertations, EBSCO host, Academic Search Complete, and Education Source. While using databases, the following keywords were used: *classroom management, behavior interventions, behavior modification, positive response, low-social economics and behavior, negative child behavior, teacher attrition, and inclusion, mainstream, and challenging behavior.*

In past research, classroom management has typically focused on individual teacher practices that have some level of evidence to support their adoption within the classrooms (Shaw, 2016). The assumption is that, if specific practices are effective, then these practices are equally valid; that is not always a logical assumption given the diverse population of students in classrooms across the United States (Olive, 2011). However, textbooks are written, policies are established, and school regulations are provided to school personnel based on the premise that practices are equally valid across the classrooms (Olive, 2011). Educators graduate from college with the expectation that students behave like the models that they have read about in textbooks and that they experience in their teaching practicums. These expectations do not always prepare elementary or secondary teachers to handle challenging behaviors experienced in the classroom. This presents a gap between theory and practice (Winkle-Wagner, Huta, & Ortloff, 2016).

The intention of this review of literature was to identify behavior techniques and effective modern-day classroom management methods that could be utilized to inform an action research study on behavioral management practices conducted at a fifth-grade class of Public School 1 that experienced behavioral management problems. Effectual classroom administration focuses on preventive methods versus reactive methods (Oliver, 2011). To be successful in classroom management, the educator should understand the prosocial behavioral relationship between the teacher and the student and their role as a facilitator in learning as well as their impact on students' behavior (Henderson & McClinton, 2016). Behavior management is defined as the process that leads children to change their actions within an environment (Perle, 2016). In practice, behavior management is used to change the undesired behaviors. This process involves identifying the unwanted behavior and providing alternative means and strategies to reduce the undesired behavior. The child's response to the change is defined as prosocial behavior (Khafi, Tuppet, & Yates, 2016). One well known strategy that encourages a shift in behavior through positive reinforcement is known as Behavior Modification (NCSP, 2016).

Educators who do not manage under the conventional concept of teaching but navigate and expedite students in acquiring knowledge for themselves, tend to have better classroom management by 90% (Mazarin, 2003; McLean, 2014). The fifth-grade educator must be a transitional leader, willing to adapt, motivate, and encourage a change in behavior. Skinner (1953) believed the best way to comprehend behavior was to examine the causes of an incident and its precursors and deal with operant or voluntary measures that manipulate the surrounding environment. A simple way to change and shape behavior is to provide learners responses to their performance, validation, reassurance, affirmation, and to be their accolades (NCSP, 2016). When a schedule of reinforcement is given, it is called variable- ratio, "Variable-ratio produces

the highest response rate for students learning a new task” (McLeod, 2015, p. 7). When educators utilize positive reinforcement on a consistent basis, their students’ performance will improve and then eventually only the reinforced behavior will be displayed (McLeod, 2015). Positive reinforcement is given when the desired behavior has been demonstrated; then the desired behavior will surface more frequently and eventually the negative behavior will no longer be present.

In the small social, economically challenged areas of Eastern North Carolina, fifth grade educators are focused on meeting the demands of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB) also known as Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESSA). The legislators of the NCLB mandated all public institutes, receiving governmental subsidy, to proctor statewide regulated yearly exams in grades 3–12. The NCLB requires schools to hire highly qualified certified educators that possess an earned bachelor’s degree with a passing score on a subject area. However, there are not any regulations that mandate training for behavior management. All schools accepting Title 1 funding must prove continuous academic growth annually known as Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Adequate Yearly Progress is measured by standards developed by the United States Department of Education (2016), which includes schools’ academic performances on standardized tests. United States Department of Education requires each teacher to adhere to the pacing guides, which indirectly forces educators to concentrate on test scores and there can be a tendency to teach to the test (Connolly & Giouroukakis , 2016). When educators are focusing on teaching to the test, some students become bored, disengaged and when students are bored, they find ways to get attention (Bele et al., 2013). Once students are seeking attention, some students will begin to be disruptive or display negative behavior.

If there is an undesired behavior or a disruption in the classroom, the teacher reserves the right to have the child removed from the class. Often, a teacher responds to negative behavior with the mindset of not having the time to deal with the negative behavior and removes the child from the classroom to prevent further disruptions (McLean, 2014). As a result, an office referral is given, or the child is assigned to In-School Suspension (ISS) for a prescribed period. This often leads to students with behavioral concerns not being addressed. In many cases, a behavioral issue that is consistent may very well serve as the first indicator that the student is at risk of an emotional and behavior disorder (Menzies, 2011). Henderson and McClinton (2016) suggest that many teachers are either too focused on the “teaching” aspect of their jobs and do not take adequate time to identify the child as a potential risk, or they have not been properly trained how to handle or pinpoint children with possible behavior disorders (Menzies, 2011; Wagner, Newman, & Knokey, 2011).

The Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which was amended in 1997, requires students to be in the least restrictive classrooms. That means that children with behavioral issues will be in a typical classroom, or what is known as mainstream. In fall 2012, 95% of 6 to 21-year-old students with disabilities were served in public schools; 3% were served in a separate school for students with disabilities and 1% were placed in regular private schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Sixty-two percent of students in a regular classroom are diagnosed with behavioral disorders (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Mainstreaming students may seem like a solution to inclusion, but in practice it adds stressors to the classroom. Mainstreaming students who yell, make unusual noises, or have loud repetitive outbursts, during instructing time can interrupt the classroom environment. Educators have not been trained to handle mild to extreme behavioral issues in regular education classroom settings (Henderson &

McClinton, 2016). The local public schools are in low economic areas, and they are also suffering budget cuts and, as a result of it, teachers have less resources for their students. Students that are mentally challenged and have been mainstreamed are suffering the worst from the budget cuts.

Due to the budget cuts, teachers have lost stipends, tenure, and payment for advanced degrees; therefore, many special education teachers resign (Block, 2014). As recourse, a vast number of students are being mainstreamed in classes with professionals that have less than three years of teaching experience in a regular education class. In 2015, in Raleigh, NC, there were 900 teacher positions available (Block, 2014). Block also stated that special needs students were placed in regular fifth-grade education classes because there were not enough special education teachers or highly qualified teachers to serve them. Due to the lack of funding, some intermediate special education classes had been stopped, and some of those students were mainstreamed when they would ideally be separated, based on their learning needs (Block, 2014). The disturbances in the classrooms result from the classrooms having too many diversified learners in one group setting. Any last-minute changes will cause educators to be unprepared to handle any situation that mainstreaming may bring, which in turn affects the classroom management.

Students that make loud noises, have outbursts, or cause any other distractions cannot be suspended from school if they have Individualized Education Plan (IEP). So, in turn, teachers time them out in another teacher's room. Timeout in other teachers' classrooms is referred to as “bounce”, but how many times a day or week can an educator bounce a student for known issues? What other alternatives do educators have to enforce classroom/behavioral management?

Behavioral and classroom management concerns are not a new phenomenon, yet behavioral problems are on the rise (Regional News, 2016). As of November 15, 2016, nine hundred notices were sent out for student's inappropriate behavior in Havelock, NC with a large low socio-economic status population (Regional News, 2016). This data shows that behavioral problems are an issue to be concerned about and which gives rise to several questions.

Based on this literature review, which develops a unique conceptual framework using social behavior theory, prosocial behavior theory, and change theory to understand behavior modification in relationship to classroom management, there were reasons for an investigation to examine the impact of prosocial behavior theory on behavior modification. This literature review provided an analysis and substantial support for pursuing an action research project. The action research project was intended to answer multi-facet questions like: What affects classroom management? How do prosocial behavior theory and behavior theory influence change theory? and What are the effects of prosocial behavior theory and evolution theory? If fifth grade educators become focused on solving their fifth graders' behavior problems, instead of focusing on controlling their undesired behavior, and work on positive student relationships, then they can bridge the gap between behavior theory and teacher practices.

In the United States referrals for students' behavior issues have increased by 40% over the past six years (Duncan, 2014). Texas A&M University conducted a study that focused on 1 million schools located in the state of Texas. The study concluded that 60% of the students had been suspended or expelled at least once and that approximately 59% of those students were disciplined eleven times or more due to behavior problems (Texas A&M University, 2011). It is evident that classroom behavioral problems provoke several issues in a classroom such as low standardized test scores, low grades, negative classroom environment, and teacher stressors.

Students that exhibit behavior problems, such as aggression and non-compliance, are more likely to have minimal engagement time in the classroom. When students are not engaged in learning while the teacher is teaching, students tend to miss instruction time causing a lag behind their peers, which in turn poses significant challenges for teachers. Teachers who attempt to focus on teaching, while fifth grade students are engaging in disruptive behaviors, experience difficulties in keeping students on task and in sync with the states' pacing guide (Menzies, 2011). The results of this research may give potentially struggling fifth grade teachers the opportunity to understand what the researchers have studied and apply the necessary classroom management techniques in order to better deal with students that may become disruptive.

### **Conceptual Framework**

#### **Prosocial Behavior Theory**

Prosocial behavior is an action that motivates one to perform positively and impacts a community (Pam, 2017). Prosocial behavior is also defined as behavior to help promote the well-being of others and it may be initiated and motivated by anyone (Hutt, 2017, p 12). One of the first life-changing, social, behavioral relationship that a child encounters is between the mother and the child. Studies show that children who have had attachment issues between the ages of birth to three years old tend to show behavior problems between the ages of five and eight years (Efrat, Yates, & Tuppet, 2016). Children who have had attachment issues in their early years of development that are placed in traditional classroom settings may develop aggression (Efrat et al., 2016; Powers, 2011). Preschoolers are three times more likely to be expelled from public preschools than their K–12 peers (Neufeld, 2015). Children who have experienced attachment issues and a sense of distrust are affected in the way they behave, interact, view, and perceive other relationships (Efrat et al., 2016). Trust versus mistrust is a



stage of psychological and social development (Erikson, 1997). Psychological development contributes to social development, which in turn influences behavior.

Factors that can influence a child's social behavior may include his or her home environment, parental/sibling relationships, and low-social economic status (Langton, Collishaw, Goodman, Pickles, & Maughan, 2011). Studies show that there is a direct correlation between students from low social economics and negative behavior (Langton et al., 2011). Langton et al. (2011) reported that, in a study which consisted of 2,765 children living on a monthly income of \$900 to \$1,000, 75% of those children were identified as at risk for behavioral problems. Their study also indicated that behavioral problems were associated with numerous risk factors related to low-socioeconomics that were found in children's lives. Adolescents from low-income families are more likely to experience more emotional difficulties than their affluent peers (Langton et al., 2011). Students that live in low economic areas tend to have some emotional difficulties because of the lack of social stimulation. Children from low socioeconomic status backgrounds were found to have a higher incidence of behavior problems and increased risk of significant language problems as compared to the general population (Kaiser, 2003; Law et al., 2014) and children with language delays exhibited more problem behaviors and poorer social skills on some of the observational measures than children with typical language development (Kaiser, 2004; Law et al., 2014).

Students from low social economic background also perform lower academically because they tend to struggle with being engaged (Jensen, 2013) and they struggle with that because of environmental stressors, child characteristics, and lack of psychosocial development (Reijneveld, Wiegersma, Ormel, Verhulst, Vollebergh, & Jansen, 2014). Lack of psychosocial development can be a precursor or an indicator of undiagnosed mental health issues. When students have

problems being engaged, teachers can expect the possibility of undiagnosed mental health issues as well as a lack of positive social behavior skills (Saraf, 2013).

### **Social Behavior Theory**

Social behavior theory asserts that the interaction between people includes verbal and non-verbal communication (Dobson, 1970). Social behavior also involves the way students respond to their environment as well as to other students within their classroom. This type of behavior is demonstrated by the teacher as well as the students; teachers can create a positive or negative classroom environment by the way she or he communicates with their students (Miller, 2007). Teacher's written communication, non-verbal communication, and verbal communication affect the student's social behavior (Sitnick et al., 2015). They help to create the classroom environment through classroom management.

Classroom management decisions have twice the impact on pupil achievement than school policies regarding curriculum, assessment, staff collegiality, and community involvement (Arndt, 2016). The teacher-student relationship must be built on respect, discipline, and ongoing interaction on instructional matters (Dobson, 1970). Past studies show that, when teachers have positive student interactions, their students spent more time engaged in learning by 76% (Hunt, 2010), and that teachers who frequently respond inappropriately to children's behavior, encourages a child to behave inappropriately (Miller, 2007). In theory, a dysfunctional home environment combined with a low social-economic status affects the child's social behavior (Sitnick et al., 2015). Maughan's 2011 study showed that there is a direct correlation between students from low social economics and negative behavior.

## **Change Theory**

Change theory is defined as a three-step process that is used to initiate a change in behavior. Kurt Lewin was credited for introducing the change theory, also known as the unfreezing-change-refreeze process, which causes negative behavior to be eliminated and replaced (Ayres, 2014). When this strategy is applied along in conjunction with Bernard M. Bass' transformational theory, the results can be very positive (Ayres, 2014). When educators use the characteristics of the transformational theory, they can empower their students to change their behavior. In order to create an environment conducive for change, educators must be willing to take the time to promote social competence and social readiness and, when they do that, conduct problems are reduced (Ayres, 2014).

Henderson and McClinton's (2016) completed a study that used social competence and social readiness and it suggests that this particular strategy reduces risk factors that lead to delinquency. They also reported that, after one year of the study, the results as well as their effects were supported by parents and children with high-risk behavior problems. According to Ayres (2014), the implementation of a prevention program that is characterized by high rates of positivity and support is highly effective since student-teacher interactions that foster the development of self-regulation and conflict management skills reduces student aggression.

Thomas, Bieman, and Powers (2016) completed a study on first grade students that had problems with aggression, and their study suggested that the quality of the classroom environment made independent contributions to the change in students' behavior problems. They used the promotion of social competence and social readiness to change the aggressive behavior. This is a prime example of how change theory and transformational approach works. When students show behavior problems such as aggression and non-compliance, the educator

can expect to see limited engagement and minimal productivity; which pose significant challenges and make it difficult for teachers to focus excessively on teaching and learning (Menzies, 2011). These behaviors may occur for various reasons, but this research will give a potential struggling teacher the opportunity to gain new knowledge as well as realistic theories to inform their practice.

## **Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature**

### **Student–Teacher Relationship**

Many factors affect classroom management. Classroom management is not only how a teacher handles the affairs of a classroom but also understanding what, how, who, and when the classroom environment is affected (Arndt, 2016). In a classroom, the relational factors and various social relationships must be considered and viewed closer. One of the most influential social contacts occurs between teachers and students, and this relationship does affect the child's achievement (Arndt, 2016). Educators' practices have twice the impact on students' accomplishment than school policies about curriculum, assessment, and community involvement (Arndt, 2016); therefore, it is important for educators and students to have support from parents as well as from community members. Community and family involvement in the classroom make the teachers feel supported and it is vital that the teacher understands her impact on the community as well (Shin & Ryan, 2016).

The student–teacher relationship is often viewed as having something to do with students' individual personality traits, or whether a student and teacher “get along” or “coexist” amongst another. This is a misconception; the student–teacher relationship is about the teacher becoming a support, a motivator that provokes learning, achievement, and engagement (Reyes & Rivers, 2012). Emotional support from educators motivates students to trust teachers and, in

turn, it helps students to engage in their academic work as well. Studies show that classes, where the teacher offered higher emotional support, had few behavioral concerns (Reyes & Rivers, 2012). Shin and Ryan (2016) stated “teachers’ emotional support has been shown to be important for a range of academics and social behaviors” (p. 15).

The student–teacher relationship should be viewed as the instructors’ capability to cultivate an emotive, encouraging atmosphere that motivates students to become actively engaged and analyses showed that a positive emotional climate in the classroom promotes academic achievement (Reyes & Rivers, 2012). When students are actively engaged in learning, student’s behavioral problems decrease. Past studies also show that when teachers have positive interactions with their students, students spent more time involved in learning by 76% (Hunt, 2010). Reyes and Rivers’ (2012) case study reported that when the engagement was high, there was not only an increase in school attendance but also a 75% increase in grades. When teachers respond inappropriately to children, the negative response from the teacher becomes a trigger for students to respond with inappropriate misbehavior (Miller, 2007).

Studies show that when misconduct is present, “students’ disengagement or disaffection from school (including lack of effort, passivity, boredom, apathy, and frustration) can exacerbate these risky behaviors and contribute to underachievement” (Pitzer & Skinner, 2017, p. 15). Student-teacher relationships at the middle and high school levels are just as equally important as they are at the elementary school level. There is a significant amount of research detailing the student–teacher relationship in the earlier stages of education, but there is a lack of studies investigating the student–teacher relationship for students aged 10 through 13 years of age (Pitzer & Skinner, 2017).

Specifically, the students who had productive student–teacher relationships in their earlier stages of learning are more likely to continue to achieve academic success and are less apt to drop out before graduation if they can foster those types of positive and supportive relationships. Gallagher (2010) states that there is a direct correlation between positive student–teacher relations and positive scholastic and social outcomes for pupils. In environments where healthy, involved, and engaging relationships were prevalent, there was an increase in student attendance, as well as academic performance and a decrease in behavioral problems. In cases where there were not strong student–teacher relationships, attendance and grades were lower and there was a higher rate of behavioral issues.

Researchers have found that positive relationships between educators and students can offer support for social progress as well as academic growth (Edrisinha et al., 2011). Positive student–teacher relationships are linked with an attachment theory—just like a parent. A healthy student–teacher relationship is linked with attachment theory that helps students to build a level of trust for the teacher, which in turn allows the student to develop a sense of safety and security (Edrisinha et al., 2011). A bond that is comparable to the type of relationship that exists between a parent and a child; this provides the student with the necessary social support platform enabling them to build important social and academic skills. Teachers who help students in the learning environment can positively impact their academic and social outcomes and these lasting effects carry on through adulthood (Gallagher, 2010). When faculty form bonds with pupils, classrooms become contributory spaces in which students can engage intellectually and in socially constructive ways (Jensen, 2013). Gallagher (2010) makes a clear point that the existences of closeness, warmth, and positivity yields auspicious student–teacher relations. Educators have the

opportunity to help facilitate peer relationships and help develop healthy social-emotional interactions that provide the basis for secure connections.

### **Low Socioeconomic Status**

Students who come from low socioeconomic environment are at a higher risk for problematic behaviors in adolescence by three times as to compared to middle-class students (Majid, 2016). Children living in low socioeconomic areas are more likely not to be seen by a physician due to financial reasons. When students do not regularly attend doctor's visits, they are more liable to have missed stages in development or unseen social-emotional behavior problems. As a result, students are at risk for emotional and behavioral disorders (Bele et al., 2013), which present a multitude of practices that impede the learning process and increase challenges for the general education teacher (Culpepper, 2006). Mental health problems among children significantly disrupt children's ability to function socially, emotionally, and academically, and teachers are often the first to recognize abnormal behavior.

However, if screenings were done at school just like they are done before enrollment for non-profit government funded programs such as Smart Start, Early Head start, or More at Four types of preschool programs, teachers would have the ability to raise questions about family mental health and behavioral history. If parents elect for their child to attend preschool, which is not a state requirement, they are required to attend workshops and complete development and language screenings, physical and hearing exams, and a family history questionnaire (Bele et al., 2013), which provides analyses on children with behavioral problems and the connection of the child's family history. Bele et al., (2013) concluded in a study that there was a strong correlation between the child with behavior problems and mental illnesses in the child's family. If the child's mother has mental problems, then the child has a greater risk of having mental or

behavioral issues. They also concluded that a child's family could be a potential antecedent or warning for future mental/ behavioral disorders. Having this knowledge is vital to educators because this would let them help the students and parents with academic planning for Individual Educational Plans (IEP). The IEP would save some children from being placed in regular education and let them have access to mental health help or a special school for children with mental illnesses (Bele et al., 2013). Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds tend to have a higher risk for undiagnosed mental health concerns (Bele et al., 2013).

### **The Challenge**

There may be no greater hurdle in public schools today than that presented by students who show challenging behavior (Westling, 2010). Students with high-incidence disabilities, as well as those who do not have disabilities, exhibit disruptive and destructive behaviors that interfere with the process of education and place high stress on teachers (Westling, 2010). High stress levels in the classroom can encourage teachers to ineffectively handle classroom management. To address this situation, school systems often have mentoring programs to help new teachers deal with classroom management issues and high stress levels. However, most of those mentoring programs do not focus solely on classroom management or high stress. Their goal is to help the teacher adjust during the first year of teaching and that covers other things like school policy and procedures and not too much time is devoted to classroom management / discipline. Mentoring programs are dedicated to keep teachers employed during the first year and are not available to fifth grade teachers who are struggling after their first year of teaching. As a result, the mentoring program is not the strongest predictor of attrition and thereby do not support teachers in the classroom (Shernoff, Marinez-Lora, Frazier, Jakobsons, & Atkins, 2011).



Effective teachers use universal classroom management practices in reducing disruptive, aggressive, and inappropriate behaviors; which in turn eliminates stressors.

The purpose of this action research dissertation study was to identify behavior techniques and effective modern-day classroom management methods that could be utilized in the classroom. This study was designed to understand what was causing the behavioral problems that were leading up to teacher office referrals and in-school suspensions. Effective classroom management focuses on preventive methods rather than reactive methods (Oliver, 2011). To be successful in classroom management, the educator must understand the prosocial behavioral relationship between the teacher and the student. The instructor must understand their role as a facilitator in learning and the effect this has on students' behavior. The educator must be a transitional leader, willing to adapt, motivate, encourage change behavior, and develop the mindset of an expert teacher (Hattie, 2013). Hattie, after a comparison study that examined the non-experienced teacher and the expert teacher, concluded that expert teachers' success with teaching and learning are attributed to the teacher's mindset. Mindset is the way a teacher's view his or her role in the classroom. Expert teachers see themselves as an evaluator; focusing primarily on their role to evaluate their effect on learning (Hattie, 2013, p. 2). Once the educator understands his or her role, he or she can adequately understand how his or her behavior can impact students' achievement and behavior, following Skinner's (2011) belief that the best way to understand behavior is to look at the causes of an action and its consequences.

Elementary teachers may lack enough training in behavior management and need to learn how to control a classroom environment so optimal teaching and learning can take place (Schindelheim, 2010). The top five schools in North Carolina's teacher educational program share the same general educational requirements as other teacher education programs. The

Department of Public Instruction (2017) established the general core requirements for licensure in the state, but licensure requirements vary by state as well as the methods to obtain certification. North Carolina also allows an exchange of licenses from other states. One way to obtain licensure in North Carolina is lateral entry (Department of Public Instruction, 2017). This method allows professionals that have a Bachelor of Science degree to teach under a written contract promising to meet the state teaching requirements within the three-year time span. Another known method for professionals to obtain licensure to teach in elementary school is by earning a degree in Early Childhood Education. Professionals are also required to take an exam scoring a minimum score of 140 (Department of Public Instruction, 2017). The educational institution will apply for the Birth-through Kindergarten license (BK) and later the educator may also add on an elementary license by taking an exam with a passing score. The Department of Public Instruction (2017) determines the various methods of obtaining a teacher's license that will permit professionals to enter the area of education; but the downside is this allows new professionals who are not qualified (Department of Public Instruction, 2017). An underqualified educator indirectly affects the classroom management and students' academic achievement.

Special education and general education teachers have to deal with disruptive students efficiently and positively (Schindelheim, 2010). Jennings, Frank, Snowberg, Coccia, and Greenberg (2013) found, in a study on improving classroom environment through CARE program, that experimental teachers showed significantly better classroom management skills than control teachers. Innovative teachers showed less frustration, better coping skills, and less stress; therefore, they could refrain from responding to negative behavior inadequately and removing students from the classroom too quickly. Time away from instruction reduces opportunities for learning in the classroom for all students (Flower, 2015). Adolescents with

learning and behavioral impairments should receive appropriate, evidence-based interventions. Evidenced-based interventions are the ones that have been proven to work best with children that have behavioral difficulties. Studies show that behavior concerns are on the rise; an increase from 20.1% for ages 10–11 to 32.2% at age 19 (Jansen, 2014).

## **Interventions**

The most modern classroom management strategies that have been proven to improve classroom behavior are those that fit within a behavioral paradigm (Hart, 2010). The goal of positive behavior support is not just for “fixing” the student with behavioral challenges but also on “fixing” aspects of the learning environment that contribute to the problem behavior (Otten & Tuttle, 2010). By providing intensive support of evidence-based practices for classrooms, teachers had the success rate of 91% (Otten & Tuttle, 2010). Limitations associated with the evidence-based practice was that it is time-consuming and would need to be done early in the school year; it would take time to determine which evidence-based method would work for a particular class.

Class Maps Consultation is a strategy of consultation to evaluate the level of risk and protective factor. It focuses on listing the behaviors in sub-categories. Once all the behaviors are viewed and grouped, a discussion of potential intervention strategies are identified, and then a plan of intervention is formed. After the interventions have been formed, the intervention plan is carried out and the outcome is documented. If the intervention is successful, the interventions are repeated, and the process continues for the rest of the undesired behaviors. Interventions that reinforce model behavior continues so that a larger number of successes for those students are achieved (Doll, 2008).

The next well-known program that has yielded significant numbers statewide is the Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS). It typically needs a whole school support which could, in turn, be a limitation if only certain groups need behavior modification. Introduction and implementation of a PBIS system of positive behavior intervention and supports could begin with a small group for positive reinforcements and then could increase eventually to reach consistent school-wide implementation (Shander-Reynolds, 2015).

Studies like Shaw (2016) and Roundtree (2011) focused on utilizing character education as a preventive tool and a behavior intervention. Roundtree's study took place in two urban public schools with 43 teachers, 40 parents, 30 teachers, and five administrators (Roundtree, 2011). The two urban schools had been in the media due to their numerous cases of school violence, school shooting, and violent crimes. Roundtree suggested that character education is needed in order to change the attitudes of students. The character education classes were taught everyday by the in-school suspension teacher. The classes focused on teaching the participant students morals, values, and how to behave. Roundtree made it clear that when students are subjected to some negative environments, it can be expected that those students' behavior will be impacted by the negative environment and reported that there was a decrease in the number of in-school suspensions, once students' attitudes, and values were changed (Roundtree, 2011).

Shaw's research study took place in 12 urban elementary schools in the Midwest, with 350 teachers. This urban school was having problems with the following infractions: attendance, bullying, drugs/alcohol/tobacco, disrespect, defiance of authority, and disruptive behavior (Shaw, 2016, p. 4). Shaw's study focused more on the teachers' understanding of behavior than on the students needing to learn how to behave. Its overall focus was on the relationship between implementation of character education and student discipline. Shaw pinpointed in his study that

once the teachers understood what the traits of character education were, the expectation of students' behavior changed, based on how the teachers disciplined the students. It was apparent that the teachers played a big part in discipline (Shaw, 2016). Once the teachers had to teach character education to the students, they developed a no tolerance ideology; the school suspensions increased, but the seriousness of infractions decreased (Shaw, 2016). However, the study heightened awareness at the local school.

### **Traditional Classroom Management Methods**

In past research, classroom management was concentrated on independent practices that had some degree of evidence to advocate their endorsement within the classrooms. The assumption was that if specific practices are effective, then it will be equally valid; but that is not the case. Fifth grade educator's college textbooks were written by people who are not in the classrooms. Policies were formed based off the knowledge of experts who have never taught children in a classroom and then textbooks were written based of those experts' ideologies. Those same policies became school guidelines and those guidelines were given to school administration based on those assumptions to be correct (Olive, 2011). Fifth grade educators graduate with an assumption that students behave like the models that they have been studying and that assumption makes them unprepared/untrained to handle challenging behaviors, which represents a gap between theory and practice. How can the gap be closed between theory and practice?

### **No Child Left Behind**

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was formerly known as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, Congress passed it in 2001, and NCLB was signed into law by President George W. Bush on Jan. 8, 2002, (Editorial Projects in Education Research

Center, 2015). The NCLB Act is responsible for the United States increasing their standards in education so that the educational system would be comparable to other countries (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2015). In the small social, economic-challenged areas of Eastern North Carolina, it appears that the focus has been on meeting the demands of the No Child Left Behind Act. The NCLB requires all public schools receiving federal funding to administer a statewide standardized test annually, to ensure that all students are meeting the state's minimal standards for their grade level. It also requires educators to be highly qualified, and those standards are basic: a degree and passing test score in the subject area that he or she teaches.

However, there are not any regulations outlining training for behavior management. Schools accepting Title 1 funding must show an increase in standardized achievement tests. It also declares that each teacher should meet highly qualified standards for teacher certification and license. Focusing on test scores and following a time sensitive pacing guide indirectly forces educators to concentrate on the result of test scores and, in some cases, leads to teaching to the test. Any time there is undesired behavior or disruptions it is easier to have the child removed from the class than to try to mediate the poor response. The teacher responds to negative behavior with the mindset of "I do not have time to focus on his behavioral needs", as a result, an office referral is given, and then the child is sent to in-school suspension known as (ISS). Sending students to in-school suspension is just a temporary fix, and behavioral issues are never addressed. This allows students with behavior issues to be overlooked, when that could be the first indicator that the student is at risk of emotional and behavior disorder (Menzies, 2011).

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) replaced the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2015. The two laws shared the same vision for students' long-term achievement, but they address the

same goals with a few modifications. Under the ESSA law, local school systems could explore “innovative” tests or use national recognized test (Jones, 2015). Schools have the option to create their own tests that align with personalized learning and competency-based education. ESSA changed the limit on the number of students who could take an alternate test. Only 1% of all students can be given alternative test while previously, with NCLB, there was not limit on the number of students who could take the alternate test (Jones, 2015).

NCLB focused solely on student academic achievement and primarily used state reading and math test scores to evaluate how schools were doing. Under ESSA, each state must use four academic factors that are included in the law and must choose a fifth factor that impacts school quality (Jones, 2015). Besides, there are no federal penalties for schools whose students do not meet achievement targets, whereas the NCLB utilized the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) to measure school’s success and penalize the schools whose students did not meet the AYP targets (Jones, 2015).

ESSA requires every state to utilize proven evidence-based resources to help low performing and students with special needs (Jones, 2015). It funded evidence-based instruction in literacy skills, including writing, phonological awareness, dyslexia, and decoding. NCLB excluded funding for literacy and never required evidence-based resources for children with special needs (Jones, 2015). ESSA put in place the Universal Design for learning (UDL) that focuses on meeting the needs of all the students including those with learning and attention deficient while NCLB only focused on children with special needs (Jones, 2015).

The Disabilities Education Act was initially known as the Education of Handicapped Children Act, passed in 1975, but it was amended in First in 1990, then in 1997 to the IDEA Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Prior to the implementation of this act over 4 million

children with disabilities were denied access to adequate public education (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Some students could attend public schools; however, they were either placed in segregated classrooms, or placed in regular classrooms where their specific needs were never addressed. When the 2nd amendment took place in 1997, the IDEA Act required disabled students to be in the least restrictive classrooms; which means children with behavioral issues were mainstreamed into classes to learn with the kids that did not possess disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

In the fall of 2012, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that 95% of 6 to 21-year-old students with disabilities were served in regular schools, 3% were served in a separate school for students with disabilities; and 1% was placed in regular private schools. Sixty-two percent of those students diagnosed with behavioral disorders were in a regular educational classroom (NCES, 2012). Mainstreaming students sounds like a feasible solution to serve disabled students, but it creates chaos in the classroom when educators are not prepared or trained to handle behavioral issues. When fifth-grade teachers are unprepared to handle behavioral problems, these problems can lead to disruptions that can hinder the learning of other students. Students that make loud noises, outbursts, or other distracting gestures cannot be removed from the classrooms if they have an Individual Educational Plan (IEP). IEP's are legal contracts that govern the students' right to the least restrictive educational environment.

Behavioral and classroom management concerns are not new phenomena and behavioral problems are on the rise. As of November 15, 2016, 900 school suspension notices were sent out for student's inappropriate behavior at the local school in the area that this study took place (Regional News, 2016). What can principals do to decrease fifth grade referrals? What can fifth grade educators do to bridge the gap between theory and practice in behavior management?



How can fifth grade teachers identify potentially at-risk fifth-grade students? What behavioral techniques and classroom management strategies will work for fifth grade students? What can fifth grade teachers do to recognize students with potential behavioral disorders? What can fifth grade teachers do to be prepared to teach and focus on meeting state guidelines with consistent disruptive behaviors? What do fifth grade teachers correct negative learned behavior?

Students who exhibit behavior problems, such as aggression, non-compliance, and limited engagement time in the classroom, pose significant challenges for teachers to focus excessively on teaching and learning (Menzies, 2011). When students cannot stay focused and are not actively engaged in classroom assignments, they have the potential to become disruptive. This is one of many factors that affect classroom management. Classroom management is not only the result of how a teacher handles situation and the affairs of the class, but the understanding of what, how, who, and when the classroom is affected. The relational factors and various social relationships must be taken into account and viewed closer.

### **Potentially Undiagnosed Students**

Onsets of high-risk behaviors in adolescent are some factors associated with growing up in low social-economic conditions. Children who live in poverty are 2.246% more likely to exhibit high-risk behavior than those who do not fall in the low socio-economic status category (Majid, 2016). Children living in low-social economic areas are more likely not to be seen by a physician due to financial reasons. When these students are not properly examined, they stand a higher risk of becoming potential problems, due to undiagnosed missed stages of mental and social development, or unseen social-emotional behavior problems. As a result, students are at risk for emotional and behavioral disorders (Bele et al., 2013). This presents a multitude of practices that impedes the learning process and challenges general education classroom teachers

(Kamps, Wendland & Culpepper, 2006). Mental health problems significantly disrupt children's ability to function socially, emotionally, and academically as well as acting as an important antecedent of adult mental disorder (Bele et al., 2013).

There may be no greater hurdle in public schools today than that presented by students who exhibit challenging behavior (Westling, 2010). Students with and without disabilities exhibit disruptive and destructive behaviors that interfere with the process of education and places higher stress on teachers (Westling, 2010). Mentoring programs often fail to identify the most likely targets of teacher attrition (Atkins, 2011). Teacher attrition deals with the nontangible things that make teachers resign or stay in the education field. Mentoring programs ideally focus on keeping the teachers employed in education by offering training and support. Effective classroom management practices include reducing disruptive, aggressive, and inappropriate behaviors. Elementary teachers may lack sufficient training in behavior management and need to learn how to how to control a classroom (Schindelheim, 2010).

Hammond (2011) conducted a study to know how control teachers (those who did not receive behavior management strategies or instructions on how to management their class) and experimental teachers (those who did) perform in relation to class management. The researcher used a benchmark to measure their performance. Teachers who engaged in experiential learning showed significantly better classroom management skills than controlling teachers. Time away from instruction reduces students' opportunities for learning (McDaniel & Flower, 2015). Any time students are not engaged in learning is a missed opportunity for students to adhere to instruction. All adolescents with such impairing problems should receive appropriate, evidence-based interventions.

## **Discipline and Classroom Management**

The most effective classroom management strategies that improved classroom behavior are strategies that fit within a behavioral paradigm (Hart, 2010). The goal of positive behavior support is not just for “fixing” the student with behavioral challenges but also on “fixing” aspects of the learning environment that contribute to the problem behavior (Otten & Tuttle, 2010). By providing intensive support of evidence-based practices for classrooms, teachers had the success rate of 91% (Otten & Tuttle, 2010). The problem with the evidence base practices was trial and error. The limitation of this method is that it is time-consuming and needs to be planned for implementation early in the school year so that results can be measured throughout the academic year within a particular class.

The next well-known program that has yielded significant numbers is Statewide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), but it requires support from the entire school, which could, in turn, be a limitation if only certain groups need behavior modification. However, using a small group to begin implementation of a Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) program can have a greater success verses beginning with an entire school. Gradually adding students to it and, eventually reaching consistent school-wide implementation, will guarantee optimal school wide success (Shander-Reynolds, 2015).

Studies show that behavior checklists are an effective strategy for dealing with problem behaviors and that, by reducing the problem, actions result in a less stressful learning environment (Eckert, 2009). The influence of motivating students to behave positively relies on how well the teacher uses moderately the three-term contingency (Chai, 2011). Ongoing consultation and feedback directly related to classroom behaviors may be beneficial in classrooms consisting of a large number of low-income students. In order for students to be

successful with emotional and behavior disorders, the most salient practices would be those promoting class organization and sound practice management (Michaud, 2011).

### **Review of Methodological Issues**

This section reviews the methodological approaches being used in classroom management and behavioral techniques and examines the various methods that have been used to conduct research on classroom management. Reflecting on the question of how behavior modification techniques and classroom management can be used conjunctively, it is necessary to define the nature of research designs. Qualitative research deals with descriptive data which can be more challenging to analyze than quantitative data (McLeod, 2008). Quantitative research, on the other hand, articulates information that is presented in numerical form (McLeod, 2008). Quantitative and qualitative research methods are similar primarily because they are both methods of research that handle data to investigate a problem. Additionally, qualitative and quantitative research methods can be used to study the same phenomenon. However, qualitative research is most often used to study phenomenon and engages people, while quantitative analysis typically measures the frequency or numerical representation of a construct.

**Weaknesses and strengths.** Ginott (2003) used qualitative research as a method to obtain information from their participants in an office setting similar to a living room. He chose this type of technique to help build rapport and trust with the participants so that they would feel comfortable sharing their experiences. Utilizing this unfamiliar technique can be a strength for parents because they would not know exactly what the researchers would be looking for; therefore, they would be more apt to reveal their home life background. Ginott used family therapy sessions with their participants during his case studies. Ginott (2003) had the participants to explain the problems that they as parents were having with their children and used

each family individual case to suggest recommendations of how to treat the lack of discipline problems that parents had with their children. Working with parents individually, to come up with recommendations is a strength because each family structure is different, and all children's behavior vary.

Ginott's approach created a high level of questionability of the information that was being shared during the family therapy sessions from the families. Another problem with this approach was that the responses from the children were not documented or recorded so the children's point of view was not present or answered. That raises questions about the reliability of the data collected. Ginott's method isolated one variable of the study which in turned interfered with the data collection. Any bias in data collection raises questions with the trustworthiness of the data. Ginott (2003) suggested that children are not responsible for their behavior; misbehavior evolves from a lack of discipline being taught by the parents. He also suggested that educators have problems with children misbehaving in classroom settings because children have not been taught proper behaviors or interactions; therefore, they do not know how to behave in the classroom because they have not learned self-discipline (Ginott, 2003).

Hildebrand and Arndt (2016) used a focused group that consisted of four students with special needs. Utilizing a small group was a strength because it allowed them to exclusively focused on the needs of these four students. They used qualitative methods that included observation, audio transcripts and written reflections to identify strategies, classroom management and teacher practices. Numerous of studies within this literature review utilized the same methods as Hildebrand and Arndt (2016); which is a strength because they used methods that are traditional, but they strengthen their claims. The observation, audio transcripts, and written reflections helped guide teachers' development. Teachers were less likely to experience

behavioral problems from students who were placed in classrooms where positive interventions were the focus. Teacher's classroom management decisions have twice the impact on pupil achievement as do school policies regarding curriculum, assessment, staff, collegiality, and community involvement (Hildebrandt & Arndt, 2016).

William (2011) conducted a case study consisting of performance feedback, a coding system, and observations to provide feedback to teachers on management and behavioral strategies. The case study suggested that educators without advanced degrees or training could be successful despite the population of children they are working with as long as there is ongoing consultation and feedback that is directly related to the students' classroom behavior. One unique strength of William's (2011) study was that he utilized performance feedback as a follow up tool, which allows suggestions from the teachers. Allowing performance feedback while utilizing traditional methods ensures success of the intervention.

Bele et al. (2013) used a sampling method, epidemic studies, cross-sectional, social demographics, and the comparison process to identify emotional and behavioral disorders in children. The study was conducted on students who showed a high frequency of emotional and behavioral problems and explored the influence it had on the children's educational performance. Bele et al. (2013) concluded that two hundred and fifteen out of three hundred and seventy children had mental issues. The children's mental issues hindered them from their ability to function socially, emotionally, and academically. One key indicator derived from the results of the case study was, if one of the parents has a mental illness, their child will be more likely to have one.

**How does methodology drive the choice of methods?** There are many reasons why researchers select the methods they use. Ideally, the methods are chosen based on the knowledge

that the researcher brings to the arena. The researcher can shape the questions, methods, designs, and interpretation (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). Methodology describes then operations required to collect information about the concept or term, as it is a part of the designing process.

Methodology helps the researcher identify and understand particular groups that have marginalized (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). The urban community is an example of marginalization. Shernoff, Mariez-Loara, Jacobson, and Atkins (2011) used mixed methods to provide intensive support for classroom evidence-based practices for classroom management and engaging learners. They utilized more than one method to compare efficient feedback on best practices. Feedback on best practices was based on data obtained from the evidence-based practices. Shernoff et al. (2011) selected focus groups, audio tapes, observations, weekly reflections, and transcripts of seminars.

Webster-Stratton, Reid, and Hammond (2001) completed a qualitative phenomenology method study that included 61 teachers and 272 four-year-old students that were enrolled in Head Start. The researchers designed a prevention program as a strategy for reducing risk factors leading to delinquency by promoting social competence, social readiness, and reducing conduct problems. Stratton et al. (2001) discovered that after one year of the experiment, the results were maintained for parents and children with high-risk behavior problems.

McDaniel and Flower (2015) used a single subject design while observing three students with challenging behavior. Using sessions, behavior profiles, comparison methods, validity checklists, visual analysis, questionnaires, and behavior graphic organizers; they concluded that an increased use of behavior graphic organizers leads to a decrease in disruptive behavior; as result students spent more time engaged in academia.

Cressey, Whitcomb, McGilvray-Rivet, Morrison, and Shander-Reynolds (2015) used 600 students and 60 school staff members, spanning 40 classrooms, through qualitative phenomenology and derived data by self-assessment surveys, school-wide evaluation tools, observations, archival records, interviews, and documentation. They found through their analysis that the implementation of a Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) plan would eventually reach consistent school-wide operation.

Duncan, Dufrene, Sterling, and Tingstrom (2013) used qualitative phenomenology when compiling data derived from three teachers and 25 students. Using observations, feedback notes, recordings, FAIR-T, and intervention rating profiles, they concluded that generalization training might be necessary to increase teachers' SLP towards nontarget students.

Using qualitative phenomenology, Thomas et al. (2011) analyzed data from a study of 4,179 children ranging from ages 5–8, and their respective teachers from 27 schools located in Durham (North Carolina), Nashville (Tennessee), and Seattle (Washington). Data was collected using observations of five items from the Teacher Observation of Classroom Adaptation-Revised, a 6-point Likert scale, an atmosphere rating scale, and geographies. Studies showed that positive and supportive student–teacher interactions fostered the development of self-regulation and conflict-management skills. Furthermore, analyses revealed that improved classroom environment greatly reduced student’s aggressive behavior, leading to positive changes in student behavior.

### **Synthesis of Research Findings**

There are ongoing studies that attempt to pinpoint what causes children’s misbehavior (Ramsey, 2009; Rosenberg, 2011; Bele et al. 2013) and it has been suggested that there are multiple combinations of various factors that cause children’s misbehavior in the classroom.



Each child's situation has to be looked at as an individual case to identify the underlying issue that results in a child's misbehavior in the classroom. The most common reasons are violence on television and video games, fast-paced cartoons, sleep deprivation, untreated and mental health issues (Bele et al., 2013).

One known problem that causes children to misbehave stems from the consumption of violence on television and video games. In a study of 60 students, research showed that students who watched fast-paced cartoons had difficulty with activities that used executive functions (Rosenberg, 2011). Collectively students spend more time watching television and playing video games than in any other activity. Rosenberg reports that there have been connections between sleep problems and children behavior problems, poor academic performance, and obesity. Studies were completed on six hundred students and the findings concluded that if TV was reduced and violence eliminated, then their sleeping problems would subside as well as a reduction in behavioral problems (Rosenberg, 2011).

Studies also show that too little sleep can lead to behavior problems. Lack of sleep in children has been linked to students having attention deficit hyperactivity disorder known as (ADHD) (Ramsey, 2009). Differential sleep times can still affect student's behavior; students need a consistent schedule, so they can be able to anticipate what happens next. Ramsey suggested that longer sleep time was not huge, but it was significant; scores steadily increased with increasing sleep times.

Another leading factor for student's misbehavior is unknown and untreated mental health issues. A study was conducted on 370 children denoting undiagnosed mental illness (Bele et. al., 2013). Mental health problems among children significantly disrupt children's ability to function socially, emotionally, and academically. Children's misbehavior can also be an antecedent of

adult mental disorder (Bele et al., 2013). Low social economics and the affordability of medical screenings hinder students being diagnosed or treated at an early age. The results of no medical care, undiagnosed mental issues, and developmental issues are what educators are dealing with in a typical classroom.

Eiraldi (2014) decided to conduct a randomized trial to evaluate external support for the implantation of a positive behavior intervention plan. The researcher reported that the urban schools lagged in attending to the behavioral health needs of their students. If parents are poor, they are more likely not to get pre-screenings or be seen for behavioral concerns. Ideally, regular doctor visits would catch children's milestones, but if parents cannot afford those visits, then the milestones would be missed (Eiraldi, 2014). If that happens, students will arrive at school with unknown or undiagnosed developmental issues or mental issues that will lead to behavioral problems in the classroom. Eiraldi (2014) suggests that urban schools should use evidence-based interventions to contribute to reducing mental health services disparity in low -income communities. Mental health issues can cause students to be slow learners.

Dobson (1970) concluded that the root of misbehavior in the classroom is the "slow learner" and that the slow learner misbehaves because of his inability to learn as quickly as his peers. To understand the problems of the slow learner, the educator must refer to the proper distribution of intelligence quotients standing for the general population. His research denotes that the standard range of IQ scores are between 90 and 110 and that 50% of individuals scored within the middle area on the test of intelligent. Students falling between the ranges of 70 and 90 are considered slow learners and may have some form of mental illness (Dobson, 1970). Roughly 25% of students in general education classrooms have some form of mental illness; in these cases, the students may misbehave because they lack the mental capability to interact,

respond, and behave as typical students do. In order to plan a continuum of comprehensive services that focuses on prevention, early identification is necessary before establishing any intervention or behavior strategy (Hart, 2010).

### **Critique of Previous Research**

This section will provide the reader with an analysis of the research on classroom management and behavioral management techniques, based on professionals' perspectives on those areas and linking the theories to change behavior. Boote and Beile (2005) explained that having the ability to “build on the scholarship and research of those who have come before us” (p. 3) is essential. If educators could use the information that has been researched governing behavior management, they could build classroom management goals based on behavior theories. Therefore, in order for fifth grade educators to be successful in doing so, it would require they understand what it takes to establish change in each individual student as well as the overall classroom management.

Educators must be able to identify the most important perceived enablers and barriers regarding behavioral intervention and support. Through thematic analysis, it was discovered that the most common cited enablers were staff, time management, and inconsistency in discipline practices (Pinkelman, McIntosh, Rasplika, Berg, & Strickland-Cohen, 2015). Students can stay actively engaged and misbehave less if teachers use verbal prompts or cues to redirect students from utilizing inappropriate behaviors. Pinkelman et al. go on to discuss that educators should have a checklist to identify the actions, what was utilized, and the number of times prompting occurred. Information gathered from the checklists can help the school administrator in identifying strategies to use or avoid when planning for implementation and sustainability of a positive behavior intervention plan.

Being that staff is one of the biggest enablers for student's misbehavior, educators must be made aware of the effects of negative interactions versus active and supportive teacher-student interactions. The right interactions of the teacher can eliminate or reduce negative behaviors. Studies show that, when educators engage in positive interactions with students, they develop self-regulation and conflict management skills; which in turn reduces students' aggression. Thomas et al. (2011) analysis of a study conducted in a first-grade classroom revealed that aggression was decreased, and the classroom climate improved when teachers engaged in positive interactions with students in the classroom. Strong teachers tend to spend more time interacting with their students.

Ratcliff's (2008) study of 588 students found that strong effective teachers interacted more with their students during instructional activities; as a result, students spent more time engaged in learning. Ratcliff obtained information from comparing the different ways teachers engaged in instructional and non-instructional interactions with their students in two types of classrooms and determined that teachers who reacted in frustration, in an effort to control misbehavior, unwittingly caused students' misbehavior to increase. It is clear that elementary teachers may lack sufficient training in behavior management and need to be educated in classroom management.

Schinedlheim (2010) completed a study in New York City with newly graduated teachers in which he observed the classroom behavior of students and teachers before and after the behavior management seminar for special education teachers. The findings concluded that there was a significant decrease in student's negative behavior after the behavior management workshop. It is evident that special and general education teachers have to deal efficiently and

positively with disruptive students. Conclusions drawn is that behavior management knowledge is not only a special education concern but an educational one.

Olive (2011) said, “students that are in classrooms that have disruptive behaviors tend to have lower grades and poorer test scores than the typical student” (p. 15). Oliver completed a study together with six researchers from U.S. Department of Education in twelve classrooms with disruptive, inappropriate, and aggressive behavioral students. The purpose was to see if effective teachers who had control in their classrooms could perform in classes with various disruptive behaviors and affect change. The study provided proof that the effective teachers were able to control behaviors in the extremely disruptive classroom, increasing engaged time with students and reducing unnecessary disruption. Oliver (2011) concluded that the effects of a teachers’ universal classroom management practice resulted in reducing disruptive, aggressive, and inappropriate behaviors. Classroom management is an impeccable tool.

Dobson (1970) the author of *Dare to Discipline*, a top seller book, discussed how there are impeccable strategies. Dobson named the principles of reinforcement but mirrored operant conditioning theory. He said, “reinforcement is a system that accomplishes the primary behavior objective shaping of a child” (p. 202) and suggested that children need a reason for obeying other than just being told to do so. Dobson’s system of reinforcement gives the following instructions: decide what is important to the child and use it as an incentive, agree with the child to what the motivator is and then formalize the agreement with a written contract that outlines the points reward system, describe the penalties for the breaking of rules or not following instructions, and follow with rewards at once. Dobson illustrates the key is consistency and using a child’s favorite thing as the motivator to do something. He also makes it clear that the child must be aware of how many points will be taken away for each missed chore and action of disobedience.

Dobson (1970) said, “the valuable formula for controlling children is providing them the maximum reason to comply with your wishes” (p. 33). Anger is the less efficient motivation, yet it drives teachers to punish or discipline in the classrooms, when training should be set up the first day of school.

Ginott (2003) suggested that training starts with the responsibility of understanding a child's emotions. Ginott's research focused on the social-emotional behavior of a child. He acknowledged that parents and teachers have not been prepared for dealing with the emotions of students and suggested that, when teachers are faced with undesired feelings from children, the emotions are rejected, suppressed, and prettified which leads to children being preconceived as misbehaving. His research suggests that inappropriate responses to student's emotions are an invitation to disaster and result in misbehavior and that educators and parents have not been taught to show children acceptable ways of coping with their feelings or acceptable means of dealing with their emotions. It also shows that children's feelings must be recognized, and their power acknowledged. All children must be treated with respect, dignity, and handled with special care.

Another suggestion is that there should be long term and short programs that focus on character education (Ginott, 2003). Character education programs will help build relationships with children so that educators and parents can learn how to convey actions. Ginott also denoted that long-term programs can teach teachers how to become interested in what children think and feel; not just respond to their behavior or their outward compliance or rebellion. Teachers must learn to recognize the triggers before the behavior, which would assist in developing prevention methods. Triggers are whatever that causes a student to act out; it could be a phrase, a word, or a specific non-verbal response. For example, some children begin to go in rage when someone

tells them “no”; so, the word “no” would be the trigger. Prevention methods are strategies used to reduce incidents.

## **Limitations**

Price and Murnan (2004) stated that the boundaries of the study are those characteristics of design or methodology that impacted or influenced the interpretation of the findings from research. In this research, the limitations were minor because the researcher did not focus on one method for data collection. Limitations are the constraints on generalizability, applications to practice, or utility of findings that are the result of the ways in which you initially chose to design the study and the method used to set up internal and external validity (Price & Murnan, 2004). Utilizing fifth graders could present the following limitations: obtaining parental consent, parental questionnaire, teacher questionnaire, and the age range amongst fifth graders.

**Parental consent.** The researcher needed written consent from the children's legal guardian /parent to make recordings, videos, or take pictures and to take part in the action research. Obtaining permission also offered protection and authorization to use information utilized in the classroom. This also covered the researcher if he/she decided there was a question to be asked concerning a student’s reaction. However, getting the consent form signed and returned could have caused a delay or limit the use of participants within a classroom setting.

**Safe environment.** The researcher had to be mindful of the students’ environment and blend into the class without causing a disturbance, so the observations of behavior could be accurate. Disruption of the class could have potentially allowed false behaviors to surface, which in turn could have ruined the findings and baseline data and made the recommendations non-relevant and useless. The researcher had to follow school protocol; signing in at the front desk with the name as well as in the classroom. This provided the school with the knowledge as

to who was where at all times; in case an emergency happened, everyone would be accounted for.

**Age.** Ideally, fifth graders are 11-year-olds or 10-year-olds about to turn 11. It was relevant to have kids in the fifth grade with similar ages for comparison. If students had been older, it could have meant that there were other factors, like academics, to consider besides behavior. If students were between the ages of 12 and 13—the researcher would have dealt with various stages of development within one group setting, which could have made other factors to be considered like hormonal changes. If that had been the case, the researcher would have had to remove the students who did not fit the typical age range.

**Questionnaires.** The teacher and students' parents had to fill out questionnaires because they played a critical role in illuminating what behaviors were exhibited at home versus in school. The researcher could not see the student in his/her home environment, so it was imperative to use the questionnaires to compare and fill in the gap of missing observation. The home environment offered social and cultural background information, which was directly related to a child's social behavior in class.

**Less-than-ideal sample size.** The researcher could have had a situation where only half of the students could have been used in the action research. This could have resulted from the consent forms not being returned, and questionnaires not being completed by parent or legal guardian. Students could have faced the risk of disqualification from some parts of the research if the consent forms had not been signed; because the background information offered social-economics, demographics, and personal information and only parents could authorize that particular information. It was important to encapsulate the perspectives of the teacher and the parents to create a proper baseline.



After carefully reviewing the literature, the researcher realized that classroom management, and behavioral control are still relevant concerns for educators. Until now, no research has been able to identify exactly what makes each child misbehave individually inside the classroom because there are many variables to take into account. Most studies have not taken into consideration all the variables such as the child's home life, past family histories, and type of discipline in the home. Reflecting over ten years of research, it is clear that classroom management is still a problem that has not been solved, and behavior problems are continuing to rise because of societal changes, like lack of structure or discipline in homes, single young mothers, low-social economics, lack of education, younger parents, and more children in childcare. However, if research can occur in an individual classroom with children in their natural settings as well as viewing the teachers' methods of classroom management, it is possible to identify questionable things in the environment and connect classroom management with behavioral management to address behavioral concerns. The only real limitation would be the educator lacking the understanding and background of behavior management and behavior theories.

It is imperative that there is a thorough understanding of the minute method issue in a qualitative action research. There is a small number of methodological issues, but significant enough to mention. Especially, it necessary to understand what the boundaries concerning this action research are. In this qualitative action research, the strengths gave support for the researcher's questions, but the weaknesses and limitations represented the foundation to understand the methodological issues that earlier research literature presents.

Action research is the systematic inquiry designed to yield practical results that are capable of improving an aspect of practice. Action research in education is a study conducted by

colleagues in a school setting because of their common concern to improve instruction (Glickman, 1992). Being able to only see children in the classroom setting sets up one weakness as well as a limitation of the study.

Being limited to the classroom affects the validity of seeing students in his or her natural setting. The classroom is just one natural environment, but the home is another setting where potential misbehavior could occur. To understand the child's misbehavior, observations in the home setting would be helpful. Skinner's (2011) behavior theory is founded on the phenomena that a child's behavior is a result of the influence of environment factors.

One way to counteract the limitation of a child's home environment is to use demographics, intervention data, and based line probes just as Kamps, Wendland, and Culpepper (2008) did in the Journal of Positive Behavior Intervention. Using questionnaires from parents that deal with the child's behavior at home could potentially substitute for the missing piece of the child's home environment. Again, this could have potentially been a limitation as well as a weakness in this action research if parents had been overly subjective or untruthful; which could have, in turn, presented a ligament recommendation or responses.

In earlier research that was analyzed for this review, the majority of studies discussed the effects of behavior on teacher attrition, students' misbehavior, and classroom management in relationship to class structure. Teacher attrition was mentioned because highly qualified, experienced teachers quit, due to children misbehavior in the classroom. Reading articles on why teachers quit provided the information on how misbehavior causes teachers to leave—which actually causes teacher shortages and in turn affects the educators collectively. When there is a teacher shortage, classes are combined, and students are divided amongst all the educators and, by doing this, the total number of students for instruction increases (West, 2016). When special

education teachers quit, most schools get a substitute if available; if not, then they are mainstream throughout the school; an action that worsens the problem of classroom and behavior management.

Vygotsky believed that behavior is related to sociocultural theory and Cole, John-Steiner, Scribner, and Souberman (2013) expressed the belief that “every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level” (p. 5). What is seen in the classroom is a contribution or part of the child’s social, cultural exposure, and the reason the students misbehave within the classroom setting. Educators lacking the understanding of children’s behavioral concerns can also be viewed as a limitation especially when educators are completing the questionnaire. Clearly there is a misunderstanding as to what misbehaving is versus what an actual undiagnosed psychological behavior disorder (medical condition) looks like during a behavioral episode. The National Mental Health reported 73% of students living with a mental health condition experienced a mental health crisis at school (NAMI, 2016).

### **Chapter Summary**

In the preceding review of literature, it has been shown that classroom management is a problem that educators have been left to shoulder in the class. Classroom management is not just the behavior one views inside the classroom, but also how the educator keeps the structure (Kelly, 2016). It involves the interaction of the student and the teacher. It is also how the student responds to his environment and how the student has learned to behave socially. Everything revolves around prosocial, social, and cultural behavior as well as positive reinforcement.

Positive reinforcement can be used to correct negative behaviors (McLeod, 2015). Educators need the understanding of how behavior theory affects classroom behavior. With the correct strategies, educators can use positive reinforcement to change social and cultural behavior. Behavior techniques exist; it is just a matter of putting theory into practice, learning, and understanding how each theory works to drive the desired change method. Recent case studies have proven that students from low social economic areas can change behavior, provided that the student–teacher relationship remained positive. Given that the teacher delivers with the right insight, despite the disposition of the social culture, behavior change is achievable. The gaps that educators are experiencing in classroom management are a lack of understanding of the behavior theory, prosocial theory, and change theory. There have not been any studies denoting classroom management and the inclusion of the change theory, the behavior theory, and the use of positive reinforcement. Therefore, an action research with a qualitative phoneme was the best choice for the basis of the current study.

In conclusion, this literature review has provided strong support for pursuing an action research to answer the following multi-part research questions: How can educators bridge the gap between theory and practice in classroom management and behavior? How can teachers identify potentially at-risk students? What behavioral techniques and classroom management strategies work for today’s students? How can teachers recognize students with potential behavioral disorders? How can teachers be prepared to teach and focus on meeting state define guidelines with consistent disruptive behaviors? How do teachers correct negative learned behavior? How can we decrease principal referrals and student suspensions for undiagnosed students

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This action research study was designed to develop an understanding of what strategies Public School 1 could use to decrease their student suspensions and office referral rates. This school had a suspension rate of 79%, which represented 49% above the national average for this type of school and this grade level (Department of Public Instruction, 2017). To address that problem, an action research design was considered an appropriate option. Action research is defined as an “emergent inquiry process in which applied behavioral knowledge is integrated with existing organizational knowledge and applied to solve real organizational problems” (Coghlan, 2007, p. 295), and it allows a problem to be seen and evaluated, and an intervention plan developed to address the problem, and then the initial data is collected and a needs assessment takes place (Masters, 1995). After that, the intervention is implemented, monitored, data collected once again and analyzed to determine if the problem has been ameliorated (Creswell, 2008).

Hart (2010) and Hildebrand and Arndt (2016) studies point out that students’ misbehavior can result from a lack of discipline, a lack of motivational drive, environmental factors, exposure to violence, undiagnosed mental illness, or undiagnosed learning disabilities. Hart (2010) and Kelly (2016) studies suggest that student suspensions are a result of educators attempting to gain control of discipline problems. Although the literature review did not identify one specific behavior technique that works well for every single child, the literature review demonstrated that student misbehavior would impact classroom management negatively (Hildebrand & Arndt, 2016). The literature review also revealed that strategic interventions helped students and teachers to improve classroom behavior management (Kelly, 2016).

The methods in this chapter were derived from the evaluation of past research and the understanding of the method that would best help answer the research questions. The approach

selected was action research; a qualitative method used to solve local problems at schools in order to ameliorate problematic situations. Creswell (2008) describes this research as emerging questions and data that are collected in the participants' natural setting. This study was intended to understand how to best decrease the office referral/suspension rates at Public School 1.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were used to guide this study:

How do fifth grade teachers describe their experiences with classroom management at an elementary school with high principal referral and suspension rates?

1. What classroom management strategies can fifth grade teachers at Public School 1 use to decrease principal referral and student suspension rates?
2. What behavioral techniques can be implemented to decrease behavioral problems at the fifth-grade level at Public School 1?
3. What can fifth grade educators do to bridge the gap between theory and practice in behavior management?

This project was conducted over a six-month period. Data was collected in various forms, including school records, questionnaires, and interviews. Themes and topics were identified using an iterative coding process, which are described in the data analysis procedures section of this chapter. Students' individual in/out of school suspensions and office referrals patterns were reported before the intervention and post-intervention.

This chapter describes the methods that were used to answer the research questions. The researcher then describes in detail the instruments that were used, the study sample, and the data collection procedures. Following the specific methods, the researcher reviews the potential findings, the study limitations, and the ethical concerns about this study.

## **Purpose and Design of the Study**

A case study might be an ideal research method but, since this scenario is not entirely focusing on the problem, the case study design was rejected. Action research was a better fit since the researcher was interested in ameliorating the high suspension rates and office referral rates at the school as opposed to only focusing on discovering the factors that caused the behavioral problems (Coghlan, 2007). Action research “incorporates the goals of improvement and involvement which characterize any action project” (Masters, 1995, p. 4). Similar research studies used qualitative methodologies, such as case studies and phenomenology research that focused more on the student's social, economic status as a factor of behavior. Therefore, those research designs were eliminated because this study was not limited to an interpretation of factors affecting behavior or how cultural backgrounds interact in a school setting or socio-economic status affects classroom behavior (Creswell, 2013). Even though culture might have been a factor in this study, ethnographic research was eliminated as a choice because this study was not focused on shared patterns of behavior or beliefs of an entire culture (Creswell, 2013). This study investigated the high incidence of suspension rates using several qualitative techniques within the methodological framework of action research.

This study used an action research method to establish what classroom management strategies and classroom management behavior techniques could be included in an intervention to help decrease the number of office referrals in Public School 1. During the academic year 2015–2016, 1,000 students were suspended from school for one to three days (North Carolina Public Schools, 2017). Short-term suspensions were issued for non-threatening, nonserious violations.

An action research design allows a problem to be observed, evaluated, and understood so that an intervention can be developed to ameliorate the problem (Masters, 1995) and moves beyond problem identification to establishing methods to correct problems within an educational context (Gibbs, Clarke, Taylor, Silver, & Lewis, 2011). The purpose of an action research method is to utilize practical information that exemplifies day to day activities developed by the researcher and to direct future activities (Coghlan, 2007). Action research is “established in every member encounter for the situation”, as opposed to being removed from it (Coghlan, 2007, p. 295). Public School 1 fifth grade class had a severe behavioral referral and suspension problem that needed to be addressed and understood so strategies could be developed to decrease student behavior referrals and suspensions that allow teachers to focus on their students’ academic achievement. Public School 1 might need various plans of action to be implemented to improve their behavior management problem.

### **Determining Strategy**

This study used an action research model to identify classroom behavior management strategies that could be utilized in fifth-grade classrooms where high behavior referral rates exist. The researcher worked toward developing strategies to improve the referrals and suspensions process by setting up a baseline using absentee patterns, in-school suspensions totals, and the causes of students’ suspension (Mills, 2014). The baseline was used to provide “before and after” intervention comparisons. The comparisons showed the ineffectiveness or effectiveness of the recommendations for behavior strategies. At that point, the researcher was able to determine if another strategy was needed or whether the researcher could continue developing the strategy. The researcher developed and conducted time observations, interviews, and anecdotal records (Mills, 2014). Parents/guardians received a questionnaire to provide background data in order to



build a holistic look at student behavior both at school and at home. The students' lunch forms and the school's website were used to establish demographic data, geographic data, and socio-economic status. The questions that were asked helped bridge the gap for unknown information between child's home life and child's behavior at school. The researcher was interested in understanding patterns of behavior at home as well as concerns of parents. The change theory process cannot begin without knowing how a child behaves in his or her natural environment (Mills, 2014). To purposely plan change, the researcher must know all of the present factors involved in the child's social environment.

### **Research Population and Sampling Method**

The sample selected was fifth graders at a public elementary school; this represented a non-probability sampling method that was purposeful. Sampling is the process of selecting groups and this group was selected because of the past history of high office referrals and in-school suspension rate (Gibbs, Clarke, Taylor, Silver, & Lewis, 2011). There were 60 students being observed and six teachers participating in the research study. The researcher was a passive observer, who is a person that “will no longer assume the responsibilities of the teacher and will only focus on data collection” (Mills, 2016). All 60 students turned in the required information and therefore there was not a shortage of students in the study and it was necessary to replace those students with other students; consequently, the numbers remained the same. All the students that participated in the study were selected because they were fifth graders and their teachers knew them. The teacher emailed and mailed the parent questionnaires to ensure that every student could participate. The students whose parents agreed and provided all necessary forms, such as consent forms and questionnaires were included in the study. All fifth-grade

teachers went through an interview process and completed the teacher questionnaire so that the researcher could decide which fifth grade classes and teachers were the best fit for this study.

### **Instrumentation**

The collection of data came from these sources: parent and teacher questionnaires, school suspension records, teacher write-ups, office referrals, classroom observations, and video conferencing or face-to-face interviews. The students' office referrals and student school suspensions were used to establish a baseline and also to measure the effectiveness of the intervention. The parent and teacher questionnaires were used to collect data from the designated participants.

### **Parent Questionnaire**

It was used to identify students home life routines and patterns since the students could not be observed at home. In lieu of observations of students' home life, the research used the parent questionnaire which provided the missing information that teachers do not know about their students' personal lives. Shaw (2016) and Perle (2016) studies also utilized parent questionnaires in place of home observation.

The questions were as follows:

1. What time does your child go to bed?
2. Does your child have problems sleeping at night?
3. Does your child follow a routine scheduled bedtime?
4. What type of shows does your child watch on TV?
5. Does your child play video games?
6. What kind of discipline do you use?
7. When was your child's last doctor's appointment?

8. How often does your child play video games?
9. How many hours does your child watch TV daily?
10. Does your child eat breakfast in the mornings, if so what is a typical breakfast?
11. Does your child have any health/learning concerns?
12. Does your child work independently on his homework?
13. How does your child respond when he/she is asked to complete a task?
14. Does your child have friends?
15. Does your child interact with any peers?
16. Does your child's friends have a negative influence?
17. Are there any behavioral concerns at home?

**Social environment.** Questions 1 through 3 were designed to prompt the parents to explain their children's sleep patterns as well as genres of television programming (TV) they had viewed. Violent TV programs lead to lack of sleep and misbehavior (Ramsey, 2009). Questions 1 through 3 were grounded in two studies. Ramsey's (2009) study proved that there was evidence to support that differential sleep times can cause negative behavior in children. Ramsey notes that too little sleep by children can lead to attention deficit hyperactivity (ADHD), which leads to misbehavior. The second study by Rosenberg (2011) reported that 600 students were having sleep problems and the study concluded that the sleep problems and behavior problems were a result of watching violent TV content. The harmful TV exposure affected the children's ability to sleep, behave acceptably, and caused poor academic performance.

Questions 4, 5, 8, and 9 were intended to prompt the participants to explain their relationship with fast-paced cartoons, which leads to poor academic performance and

misbehavior (Shaw, 2013). Questions 4, 5, 8 and 9 were grounded in a research study by Rosenberg (2011) which was included in the consumer reports, published in the October 2011 issue of the Pediatrics Journal, asserting that what children watch on TV may affect their behavior. Roundtree (2011) and Rosenberg (2011) found that children who watched fast-paced cartoons had difficulty with activities that use executive functions. The researchers concluded that too many hours watching or playing video games can result in a decrease in academic performance.

Questions 6, 7, 10 and 11 were reflective in nature, but the questions were designed to explain the social interactions that went on in the fifth graders' home life. It was important that the researcher captured what had been done and what happened on a day-to-day basis at home. Knowing if the child had been disciplined before, and the type of discipline applied, could attribute to how the child behaved socially (Sitnick et al., 2014). The child's discipline background could shed light on how the child was being raised as well as the relationship between the child and his parents (Sitnick et al., 2014). To guide their students effectively, fifth grade educators need to know how to be consistent in administering discipline, yet understanding each child's individual disciplinary background (Sitnick et al., 2014)

Question 10 was intended to establish the child's morning eating habits, because knowing if the student had been afforded the opportunity to consume a nutritious meal is part of the Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Maslow (1943) says merely that the basic needs must be met first in order for students to be motivated to perform. To keep every child motivated, all children need to avoid skipping breakfast. Public schools should offer free regular breakfast at the start of the school day (Kesztyus, Traub, Lauer, Kesztyus & Stienacker, 2017). Knowing whether fifth graders were eating in the morning on a consistent basis could very well identify low social,

economic backgrounds or financial hardships, which could yield other factors that may need to be addressed.

Question 7 and 11 were designed to establish a history of medical care. When a child lacks consistent medical care, they may be more susceptible to experience behavioral problems. Many children have developmental delays that have not been diagnosed due to lack of medical attention. Nemours (2017) explains that an annual physician's health examination is vital to ensure the child is growing and developing normally. It is necessary to ask when the child has last seen a doctor because this could also be a sign that the child may be in a position where his/her family is not financially able to obtain routine doctor's visits. If the child has not seen a doctor in a few years, he/she may need outside referrals for non-profit doctor care. For the fifth-grade teachers to best serve the needs of their students, he/she must first know the personal needs of the individual pupil (Sitnick et al., 2014)

**Child's behavior development.** Questions 12 and 17 were designed to prompt the parents to reflect on their fifth graders' early years of development and their ability to carry out tasks. Reflecting back caused the parents to think back to the students' early childhood years and determine if there were any developmental delays or problems. The questions were reflective, but powerful because their answers could show the first sign of early detection of behavioral/learning concerns; these questions were based on Menzies (2011) study, which focused on three areas that affect the well-being of a child's academics, behavior, and social environment. Menzies made it clear to point out that behavior dynamics and social problems are just as important as academics and are co-dependents to children's behavior and social environment. Menzies' study proved that the way to solve problems is to utilize three tiers of models of prevention. She went on to say that the best way to prevent school failure is early detection and

the parents are the first ones to recognize early signs of behavior, academic, social problems (Menzies, 2011).

**Prosocial behavior.** Questions 13, 14, 15, and 16 were intended to establish the context of the participants and were derived from Hammond's (2011) study, but not directly pulled from his research. Hammond's study described how to train parents and teachers to promote social competence. Developing social capability prevents conduct problems that result in behavioral issues. The reflective questions can implicate whether there is a potential social problem which leads to behavioral issues.

### **Teacher Questionnaire**

The questions that formed the teacher questionnaire (see Appendix B) supported the study that the doctoral candidate was seeking to resolve based on what Gilpatrick (2013) stated. The questions were selected from a focus group protocol (see Appendix C). It was essential to use questions that had already been grounded in research that had proven to be useful in collecting data for the study (Mills, 2014). Utilizing these questions kept the doctoral candidate from making changes back and forth as well as wasting time trying to figure out which questions worked best to get the needed information.

The questions were used to set up a baseline for pre/post interventions so that the researcher had some data to help compare to. It was vital to have a baseline to measure the success of the intervention. These questions also provided the teachers with the liberty to write their perspectives as to what was taking place in the classroom with their students. The questions were:

1. How would you describe classroom management in your class?
2. Can you discuss the student behavior in your classroom?

3. How does student behavior in your classroom affect the classroom environment?
4. How does student behavior in your classroom affect teaching and learning in your class?
5. Can you describe an example of a classroom behavior that was challenging to manage? What kind of effect did this have on the classroom environment?
6. How did it affect your ability to teach?
7. Does noncompliant student behavior in the classroom affect other students?
8. Given your personal experiences, how do you think Adequate Yearly Progress scores might be affected by improved classroom management practices?
9. Would you embrace professional development opportunity to build a repertoire of evidence-based proactive classroom management strategies? If so, how would you like the training delivered? (mentoring, collegial coaching, study groups)?
10. Describe your experience with classroom management strategy meet the needs of challenging students?
11. What impact does effective classroom management behavioral interventions have on overall student achievement?
12. How might a desktop reference manual be helpful in building and sustain your proactive responses to student noncompliant?
13. How many students in your classroom during the school years of 2016–2017, and 2017- 2018 were mainstreamed? If you did have students that were mainstreamed, how much time where you give to prepare your classroom?
14. If you did have students with disabilities in your classroom, were you given any training before students with disabilities joined your classroom?

15. How many IEP's did you receive? Did they list accommodations for behavior?
16. What classroom behavior methods have you tried?
17. Do you feel as if you have effective classroom management strategies for students?
18. How many students have had office referrals? Among those, how many were inappropriate conduct? Approximate age?
19. How many students are receiving free lunch based off the lunch forms?
20. How might a desktop reference manual be helpful in building and sustain your proactive responses to students to on compliance?

**Current classroom management.** Questions 1, 3, 8, and 17 were designed to identify and describe the classroom management strategies and interventions that had been utilized in the 5th-grade class. It was essential that each fifth-grade class had a structured environment; one that included rules, schedules, and opportunities for active student learning. Classrooms that do not have structured environments have students that misbehave (Kamps et al., 2006). Studies revealed disruptive behaviors decrease when universal classroom management techniques are utilized (Oliver, Wehby, & Reschly, 2011).

**Educator perceptions.** Questions 2, 4, 5, and 6 were intended to explain the fifth-grade educators' perception of their student' noncompliant behaviors, the relationship between disruptive behaviors, and how the teacher's stressors affected the overall classroom experience. Questions 7 and 16 prompted the fifth-grade educator to reflect on their experiences with scientific-based behavior methods. Reijneveld et al. (2014) suggest that students should receive evidence-based interventions because these demonstrate higher success rates. Jansen et al. (2014) case study confirmed that evidence-based interventions reduced behavioral problems by 52%.



Questions 10,11, 12, and 20 were designed to depict teachers' perception of professional development and classroom management. It was vital that fifth grade teachers had the understanding that working with mentor teachers (lead teachers) can assist struggling teachers with their perceptions towards professional development and classroom management (Shernoff et al., 2011). Studies show that the most critical factor in "classroom management is building teacher skills and confidence" (Shernoff et al., 2011, p. 467).

**High-risk students.** Question 13, 14, 15 were developed to understand the nature of students that need accommodation in a mainstream classroom and the nature of support the educator receive. The quality of education that the students receive depends on the quality of classroom management (Oral, 2012).

Question 18 was designed to establish a baseline of high office referrals in the classroom and the nature of those referrals. Classroom management includes the management and supervision of the student's behavior. The teacher's job is to supervise children within the classroom and the researcher must also look at the educator's supervision roles. Management includes supervision, and supervision includes watching the children's interactions. Supervision must be looked at in order to find a potential problem, when looking at the entire classroom. Cressey et al. (2015) suggest high office referrals are a result of inadequate supervision and supervision must be looked at in order to find a potential problem. Cressey et al. conducted a case study which focused on 600 students with high office referrals and, after the implementation of the behavioral intervention, concluded that as the rate of supervision increased, the number of office referrals decreased.

Question 19 was written to provide the statistical data to establish evidence of the number of high-risk students in fifth grade. Students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds are

typically identified as high-risk students. Langton et al. stated that “adolescents from low-income families are more likely to experience more difficulties than their affluent peers” (p. 5). If fifth grade educators have this knowledge, it can be a precursor for identifying protentional behavioral problems (Langton, Collishaw, Goodman, Pickles, & Maughan, 2011).

### **Data Collection**

The data collection model was selected from Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014); their model specifically describes the best methods for qualitative data analysis. The researcher chose Miles et al. (2014) model because the researcher needed a model that had been proven to be efficient, easy to follow and simple to understand. The Miles et al. (2014) model identified more than three stages to collect and analyze data, which was a perfect fit for the data collection. The data collection involved six stages as described below:

#### **Stage I: Orientation and Interviews**

The focus group consisted of six teachers that taught fifth grade. Fifth grade students changed classes every 90 minutes, so it was imperative that the researcher spoke to each educator who the fifth graders were engaged with. There were 12 meetings in total. At the first meeting the researcher explained that all data would be de-identifiable and not linked to students or educators and that everyone would use numbers/letters and fictitious names during the research to ensure no one could link the de-identifiable information back to any participant. The researcher went over the expectations of the study, the teacher and parent questionnaires, and the demographic survey. At that time, the researcher discussed each teachers' availability for weekly meetings and planed future meetings. The researcher used that time to explain how she would collect data. The educators had the opportunity to ask questions of the researcher. Before the closing of the meeting, the researcher asked each educator what they would like to see changed

in their classroom environment, what they thought their role was in this process, and when they would like to begin a plan to implement change. Once the researcher heard the responses, an open dialog started, and from there she captured valuable information by tape recording and shorthand notetaking.

**Consent forms.** All consent forms were passed out at the orientation meeting. The consent forms and instructions on how to return the forms back to the teacher were stapled to a plain white envelope. If forms were not received back within three days, then they would be emailed and resent home. The forms would be returned in a plain envelope that did not have any identifiable information.

## **Stage II: Protocol and Data Collection**

**De-identifiable artifacts.** This action research study used a research-based classroom behavior management strategy to reduce teacher write-ups, office referrals, and school suspensions. The researcher used observation, artifacts such as suspension sheets, teacher write-ups, absentee records, lunch forms, teacher/parent questionnaires to identify the behavior patterns of 60 students, families of students, and teachers.

**Data collection de-identifiable.** Student office referrals, the teacher write-ups, and the school suspensions were collected for the year of 2015–2016 and then again for three months of the school year 2016–2017. At the end of the initial three-month cycle, the data collection cycle continued with the research-based intervention in place and the researcher collected data for additional three months. The researcher obtained the following data during another three-month cycle: school suspensions, teacher write-ups, office referral and that data determined the effectiveness of the research-based intervention.

**Teacher questionnaire and teacher demographic survey.** The teacher demographic survey was given at the first meeting. The de-identifiable data was used to compare educators' experiences and supply background information. The teacher questionnaires were completed before the intervention and after the implementation of the intervention. At the end of the last cycle, a teacher questionnaire (see Appendix B) was given to the teachers so they would have the opportunity to provide anonymous feedback.

### **Stage III: Analysis**

**Teacher observations.** The researcher used de-identifiable observations and de-identifiable teacher journals to record classroom sessions. The observations and interviews of fifth grade teachers allowed comparisons of classes showing interactions, responses, and similarities/differences of behaviors that might be causing classroom management problems. Viewing journals of students in different class settings demonstrated students' behavior at different times of the day.

**Classroom observations.** A de-identifiable matrix chart was used to include the following: type of conduct, a frequency of the conduct, disruption of class, type of behavior, response to the teacher, response to peer, teachers' actual response, time of the incident, class period, results of behavior, absentees, and suspensions. The matrix helped the researcher sort data as well as view patterns easier. The researcher looked for relational patterns between the students and teacher, and patterns of interactions. These patterns were entered into a data spreadsheet that generated numerical data. This spreadsheet produced percentages and totals for the sample.

**Teacher journals.** The researcher used de-identifiable open coding to organize categories of journals and observations and teacher journals to record classroom sessions. The

observations and interviews of the teachers allowed comparisons of classes showing interactions, responses, behaviors similarities/indifference that might be causing classroom management problems. Viewing journals of students in different class settings demonstrated students' behavior at different times of the day.

**Parent questionnaires.** The spreadsheets allowed the researcher to view each student's background as well as establish patterns between students and their environments. The questionnaires were used as a reference and background information. The researcher desired to understand students' social economics and attentively identify whether there were similarities or differences between the child's classroom and home life. The researcher looked for common situational patterns and cultural patterns.

#### **Stage IV: Intervention, Evaluation, and Analysis**

**Interventions.** The researcher analyzed interventions that had been used in past research and been proven to work for problem behaviors and developed an intervention that addressed the specific needs of the population. She selected an intervention program based on what the behavior problem was. The positive behavior intervention program had suggestions on what intervention should be used based on the behavior exhibited or the problem that was being experienced.

#### **Stage V: Synthesis of Data from Phase II and III**

**Artifacts.** The researcher synthesized all de-identifiable data from interviews, observations, and anecdotal records before and after the intervention. The synthesized data was used to develop a comprehensive focus group of fifth grade teachers.

## **Stage VI: Analysis of Data from Fifth Graders**

**Focus group.** The researcher met with the focus group and discussed in depth what the findings were. She presented documentation from data so that educators were able to visualize the class as a unit and individually and see precisely where problems arise from. The researcher discussed the observations and teacher's journals and explained whether the classroom management strategies were ineffective or whether a new classroom management plan would be needed to change the specific actions for the next cycle of teaching (Mills, 2014).

### **Identification of Attributes**

There were several attributes that were identified and inquired in this study. Classroom management reflects the educators' ability to successfully manage the students' social and emotional behavior within the classroom environment (Jennings et al., 2013). Jennings et al. identified effective classroom management skills when educators are able to demonstrate (a) positive student relationships; (b) sensitivity to students' needs; (c) prevention and intervention of early conduct problems; (d) and motivation to get students to behave (Shaw, 2013). A related attribute is classroom behavior intervention. Webster (2017) and Otten and Tuttle (2010) identified classroom behavior interventions as positive behavior support systems that are focused on assisting students with behavioral challenges and changing the aspects of the learning environment that contribute to the problem behavior (Kelly, 2016). The last identifiable attribute is teacher training and the Department of Public Instruction (DPI, 2017) established the general core requirements for licensure in NC, but licensure requirements vary by state as well as the methods to obtain certification. North Carolina also allows an exchange of licenses from other states. Teacher trainings are defined as workshops that earn renewal credit known as CEUs that

the DPI approves for the local school boards to be administered to the educators; which may vary by licensure endorsements and experience (DPI, 2017).

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Data was gathered using office referrals, teacher write-ups, school suspension, questionnaires, and interviews and there was some variation as to how the technique were used during the data collection. The researcher transcribed, typed, reviewed and then summarized all data from focus groups, interviews, and teacher journals. Data was analyzed for emerging themes from the teachers' questionnaires, interviews, teacher write-ups, and school suspensions. The de- identifiable data was keyed in one matrix sheet that had each topic categorized. The matrix was useful to tally up each column, give the totals, and also produced the percentages collectively. The researcher compared and looked for a numerical difference in the number of student office referrals written before intervention as well as a decrease in suspensions. This action research study was completed in two cycles, and thus a mixture of analytical methods was used. The researcher determined the underlying issues that were causing behavior problems within the classroom that would result in an office referral or out of school suspension, and also identified interventions that would be effective and would support classroom behavior management, which would lead to a decline in teacher write-ups and eventually a reduction of in/out school suspensions.

The parents' questionnaires had multiple-choice answers. The teachers' questionnaires were open-ended questions that required a thought-out short answer. The researcher stressed to the teachers and parents the significance of completing and answering the questionnaires in its entirety. The teacher's initial and post interviews were not structured; however, each teacher had the opportunity to respond to the researcher in confidence.

It was necessary to use some basic descriptive quantifiable methods in this action research to understand if the classroom management behavior intervention had changed the number of teacher write-ups, disruptive behaviors, office referrals, and school suspensions. This was at the most basic level and consisted of monitoring number of incidences, referrals, and suspensions before and after intervention.

### **Limitations of the Research Design**

Like any qualitative research design, this study had limitations of generalization, credibility, and researcher's involvement. In the next section, the actions to overcome those limitations are presented.

### **Validation**

**Credibility.** The researcher acknowledges the limitations and delimitations that might affect or restrict this study's credibility (Concordia, 2016). The participants were assured that their individual data would not be identifiable, nor would their information be traceable back to the individual participants. The data collected did not have any identifiable information. The de-identified information from students came in a sealed envelope and was picked up by the researcher in order to prevent anyone from changing data responses. This study's data was kept confidential and accessible only to the researcher; procedure that kept the data responses from being altered. This allowed responses that were honest and truthful, therefore increasing the credibility of the data. However, as in all research, this is a limitation because truthfulness cannot be guaranteed. The most valuable variable pertaining to validity was that the educators and parents volunteered their participation. Their consent in this action research demonstrated their concern for education, which is an indicator that the participants responses were truthful.



This action research was delimited to a fifth-grade group of educators and students, at one school in a school district; therefore, the results are limited to this one site in North Carolina. The intervention in this study may be applied in other settings, with revisions that respond to contextual realities of a school situation.

**Dependability.** The researcher states that the data obtained from the instruments was truthful and non-subjective, and therefore reliable. The researcher stressed to the teachers and parents the significance of answering truthfully and completing the questionnaires in its entirety. The researcher was the only one completing the interviews and focus groups in order to ensure that the confidential boundaries were not violated. To ensure thoroughness and to eliminate biases, there was only one researcher interviewing.

### **Expected Findings**

Hinged on the literary works that are connected to research-based classroom behavior management interventions, the expected results were to demonstrate that there would be a numerical difference in the number of student office referrals, teacher write-ups, school suspensions post intervention as compared to the school year 2015–2016. It was expected that the behavioral desk manual would help teachers change their classroom behavior management skills and support them in their behavior management strategies. Educators would acknowledge that their classroom behavior management interventions were successful within their classroom and might not be functional with a different group of fifth grade students.

### **Ethical Issues**

#### **Conflict of Interest Assessment**

There was no conflict of interest in this study. The researcher did not have a personal or professional connection to the educational site, students, administrators, or teachers. The

researcher only had an interest in addressing fifth grade classroom behavior management problems within Public School 1.

### **Researcher Position**

As a former school teacher and behavior specialist who later owned and operated a 24hr childcare center, the researcher was always in the position of helping parents and teachers handle their children's behavior. Children's behavior has always been a passion of the researcher; she enjoys assisting educators to figure out the underlying issue, and how to address the cause of the negative behavior. From her past experiences working with children during the last 20 years, the researcher has discovered that there is a shift going on with children today, as compared to what it was when she first began in the field of education in the 1990s.

To name a few things that have shifted, the family structure is no longer what it used to be. Now there is a sense of normalcy for young adults to have children; there are teenagers having babies and raising children. Back in 1980s and 1990s, a complete family unit included extended family members who assisted in the raising of children, parents were older, and there was a sense of collective responsibility for raising children. Today, there are television shows and video games that promote violence and use profanity. There are also reality television shows and kids programming, easily accessed on the internet, that model contentious behaviors, whereas back in the 90's those types of shows were not so easily accessed on television.

Thus, there are societal trends indirectly teaching children negative behavior. How can society expect to educate children the same way they were educated in the 90's when the exposure to violence, sexual content, and where confusion is so present? A question that brings the researcher back to the classroom, how can classroom teachers use classroom behavior management in today's classroom? Classroom behavior management is unique to each student

or group of students; so, it is essential that educators understand the different causes of behavior issues that esteem from outside of school. It is the researcher's understanding that the environment can shape any negative behavior with the correct techniques.

### **Ethical Issues in the Study**

The participation in this study included elementary school teachers from a school in eastern North Carolina. The researcher ensured that each participant's privacy and confidentiality was protected. The artifacts associated with suspension, observations, teacher write-ups, office referrals, parent questionnaire, and teacher questionnaires were unidentifiable. The data collected did not request any identifying information, and it remained in a sealed, unmarked envelope when it was returned to the researcher. The names of students, staff, and parents stayed anonymous, and the data collected was secured in a locked cabinet. To ensure participants' security and comfortability, the school's real name was not used in this study. The students were not video or taped recorded throughout this study to protect their identity and privacy. To eliminate peer pressure and bias throughout the research, the researcher allowed the participants two weeks to complete the questionnaire by email or paper copy at their discretion, and the result was accurately recorded.

The researcher was aware to avoid cultural and racial biases; everyone was treated fairly and with respect. All fifth-grade teachers that participated in the study took the same questionnaire and participated in the same focus groups. At each cycle, the participants were reminded of their right to not participate in the study or to withdraw from it at any time without any repercussions. This study will be a published work while the completed forms and questionnaires will be secured for three years and then destroyed.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter discussed the methodology used to investigate behavioral problems at one public school and the procedures used to collect data to develop a classroom behavior intervention to reduce disruptive behavior in fifth grade classrooms. This study intended to distinguish behavior techniques and effective modern-day interventions methods that could be utilized in fifth grade classrooms of Public School 1. The purpose of the research-based intervention was to provide fifth-grade teachers with an alternative to teacher write-ups, school suspensions, and office referrals so that the teachers can change negative behavior that leads to high suspension rates.

## **Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results**

The purpose of this action research study was to identify behavior techniques and effective modern-day classroom management methods that can be utilized in the classroom. An action research method is intended to utilize practical information gathered from day-to-day activities of individuals in order to understand their own professional practice and create knowledge or theory about their actions, and when that process of reflection, enquiry, and action is applied to teaching, the ultimate goal is to improve practice (Costelo, 2011). Therefore, this study was designed to understand what was causing the behavioral problems that were leading up to teacher office referrals and in-school suspensions in Public School 1 and also provide teachers applicable solutions as well as support in their behavior management strategies in the classroom.

Fifth grade classes of Public School 1 had severe behavioral referral and suspension problems that needed to be understood in order to develop strategies that teachers could use to decrease student behavior referrals and suspensions so they could focus on their students' academic achievement. Since action research moves beyond problem identification to establishing methods of correcting problems within an educational context (Gibbs, Clarke, Taylor, Silver, & Lewis, 2011), it was considered the most appropriate research design.

The following research questions directed this study:

How do fifth grade teachers describe their experiences with classroom management at an elementary school with high principal referral and suspension rates?

1. What classroom management strategies can fifth grade teachers at Public School 1 use to decrease principal referral and student suspension rates?

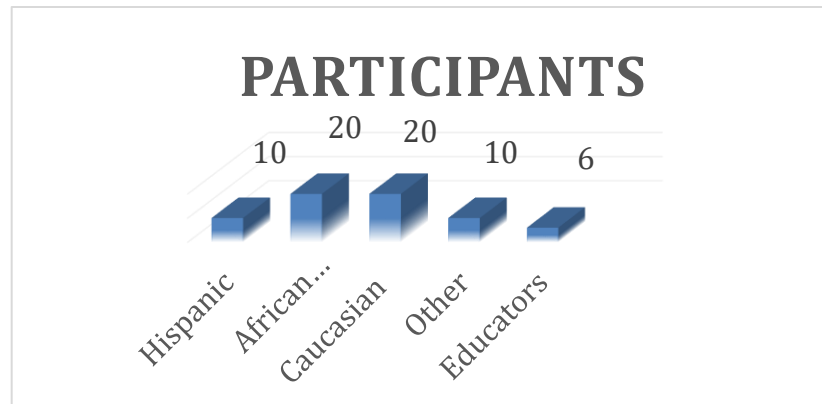
2. What behavioral techniques can be implemented to decrease behavioral problems at the fifth-grade level at Public School 1?
3. What can fifth grade educators do to bridge the gap between theory and practice in behavior management?

Data was collected over a six-month period using the following forms: parent and teacher questionnaires, school suspension records, teacher write-ups, office referrals, classroom observations, and interviews with the six educators. Themes were identified using an iterative coding process, which is described in the data analysis procedures section of this chapter. Demographic information was collected from the teacher who participated in the study.

This chapter includes the analysis of the data and the results found. First, the sample of the study is described. Next, the research methodology and data analysis are discussed. Then, the findings of the study are presented. The chapter concludes with a summary of the action research findings.

### **Description of the Sample**

The sample population of this study was formed by a total of 60 fifth grade students between the ages of 10 and 11 years, who attended Public School 1, and six fifth-grade teachers from the same school. The student sample was formed by 30 males and 30 females and their race/ethnicity is presented in Figure 1.



*Figure 1.* Student demographics by race/ethnicity.

The teachers facilitated the dissemination of the students' consent forms and the parent or guardian questionnaires; they stapled them to the student report cards to ensure that every parent or guardian would receive the paperwork. All 60 students' parents agreed to participate in the study and completed all necessary forms, including consent form, background questionnaire, and the parent questionnaire; therefore, all 60 students participated in the study. However, it took almost two and half weeks for all the forms to be returned. Each parent and guardian returned them without names in a blank white envelope. This ensured that no one knew who had completed the forms. All fifth-grade teachers at the school went through an interview process and completed the teacher questionnaire; all of them agreed to participate in the study. The researcher sent the teacher questionnaires by email.

The site administrator was the key person for getting the initial approval for the study as well as obtaining the consent forms from the educators. The administrator emailed the researcher the consent forms and then he set up the collaboration schedules because each teacher had after-school duties as well. The site administrator emailed the researcher all teacher and parent questionnaires back because picking them personally would have supposed a delay of one week due to the inclement weather. This helped the researcher to stay on the study timeline agreed upon with the school site.

Table 1 shows teachers' level of education, experience in years, the kind of licensure path they followed, and whether they took courses in classroom management.

Table 1

*Participants' Education and Experience*

Teacher Code	Experience	Highest Degree	Classroom Management Classes	Licensure
A	12 years	Masters	Yes	Traditional
B	22 years	Bachelors	No	Lateral Entry
C	10–15 years	Bachelors	No	Traditional
D	5–10 years	Bachelors	No	Lateral entry
E	2–4 years	Bachelors	One class	Traditional
F	0–1 year	Bachelors	One class	Traditional

*Note.* Pseudonyms are used in this chart and throughout the study.

The range of experience represents the teacher's experience as a licensed educator. It allowed the researcher to understand the school context at the time of the study as well as the experiences of the educators in the classroom. The subheadings "traditional" and "lateral" entry represents how the educators obtained their initial licensure from the state of North Carolina. Traditional indicates that the educator went to a 4-year university that had an accredited teacher educational program and completed a student teaching internship. Lateral entry refers to the educator who was a degreed professional working in a different field and whose previous course work was evaluated by the state licensure department; then the teacher was asked to complete additional courses and pass the state praxis while working as an educator. The lateral entry program does not require students to complete student teaching under an approved teacher education program but assumes the current teacher position in lieu of student teaching.



## **Research Methodology and Analysis**

As mentioned above, the goal of this study was to understand the cause of the behavioral problems that resulted in high referral and suspension rates at the research site. The qualitative action research design laid the foundation for addressing a well-defined purpose and providing data suitable for a detailed analytic process (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Several research tools were utilized (in-depth questionnaires, journals, and interviews), which provided detailed information from the teachers who knew what had been going on within their settings, what they thought the problems were, and how they felt about the given problems. The data was analyzed to reduce redundancy and eliminate irrelevant information. This section provides a step-by-step description of the data collection process implemented throughout the study and the data analysis done.

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected from six different sources: questionnaires administered to parents and teachers, office referrals (formal warnings), teacher write-ups (in-school suspensions), classroom observations, semi structured interviews, and previous records of out-of-school suspensions during the 2015–2016 academic year. The students' office referrals and school suspensions were used to establish a baseline to compare data before and after an intervention was implemented. Then, the researcher used the number of suspensions to measure the effectiveness of the intervention and the questionnaires to collect data from the designated participants.

The researcher used a parent questionnaire to identify students' home life routines and patterns. It consisted of 17 questions (see Appendix C) and was focused on the child's behavior at home. This provided the researcher with the homelife context that is important when addressing behavioral issues; this was information that the researcher could directly collect by

herself, since the students could not be observed at home, neither could teachers provide this information. Shaw (2016) and Perle (2016) studies also utilized parent questionnaires in place of home observation. The responses were entered in an electronic chart that helped organize the data to compare and note patterns in the data.

Teacher data was collected through individual interviews and a questionnaire. The protocols consisted of 20 questions (see Appendix B). The educators were eager to share their classroom experiences and answer the questions. The written questionnaire took the educators about 30 minutes to complete. There was one educator who had a combination class who did not feel that all the questions applied to her classroom and that educator took 90 minutes to get the responses in because she needed additional explanations for most of the questions. The individual semi structured interviews with the educators took 90 minutes per teacher and the interview with the administrator took 120 minutes. Field notes were taken, interview sessions audio-recorded, and then transcribed.

The researcher completed the classroom observations to obtain data about students' behaviors and teachers' responses to them without interfering in what happened in the classroom. The researcher sat at the teacher's desk because that seat was positioned in such a way that every student and the teacher were in direct view. It was important to the researcher to be able to see everything without having to move. The researcher followed the teacher and class during all four of the transitions that took place during the observation period. Each teacher was observed with students at different times of the day. Field notes were written in shorthand and then transcribed over to a spreadsheet and an editable electronic file. Any comment or anything that was said or discussed that was not specifically identified as part of the target questions was noted in shorthand as well. Classroom observations were vital in this study because they allowed the

researcher to understand the dynamics of each teacher's classroom and the group of students that the teacher was instructing (Reinke, Stormont, Herman, Wachsmuth, & Newcomer, 2015). The researcher observed each classroom arrangement, the interactions between students, and their responses to the teacher as well as how each teacher handled classroom management, and behavior management techniques. Classroom and teacher observation data was labeled individually as well as each teacher.

**Classroom teacher A.** As the researcher entered the room, the teacher greeted the principal and the researcher with a big smile and a handshake and said, "You may have a seat" and offered something to write with. At that very moment, the researcher began observing, before sitting down, since she needed to see what kind of tone had been established; a feeling one gets when someone enters the teacher's classroom. The first thing that the researcher noticed was a neat organized desk and a huge and extremely loud air-conditioning unit. On the right side of the room, there was a six-foot bulletin board that entailed upcoming schools' events, current week learning objectives, homework assignments, class duties, schools' expectations, and a reminder to "check your voice." The next bulletin board had list of classroom rules that included: be respectful, be prepared, be on task, be a good listener, and be safe. The next bulletin board had a saying—"What's on your mind"—and it was called the Butter Board. The butter board was a communication board where students could write what was on their minds and it was visible to the class. There was a phrase written in black on neon yellow paper stating, "Put your best foot forward" and, under that, samples of students' work. The classroom was set up in small groups of four students facing each other. Each group had been assigned a group captain. At the center of all the grouped students was a table number written in black.

**Classroom teacher B.** Classroom teacher A introduced and escorted the researcher to teacher B's classroom. Teacher B greeted the researcher with a smile and a gesture to come on in. As the researcher entered the classroom, it noted that there were not any bulletin boards; however, there was a six-foot-long chalkboard. There were rules written down: listen to your teacher, be kind to others, do your best, always learn from your mistakes, never give up, and use your manners. There were also pictures of happy faces and a diagram with positive words. In this classroom, there were five groups of students and plenty of visual aids, including an overhead projector.

**Classroom teacher C.** Teacher C classroom room had a traditional room arrangement with all the individual desks facing the front of the classroom. The first noticeable thing was the bulletin boards. The bulletin boards were built in the wall and they were located at the front of the classroom. From left to right, there were handmade laminated signs that displayed the following rules: follow directions, keep your teacher happy, make smart choices, raise your hand for permission to leave seat, and raise your hand for permission to speak. One board included the following: homework, calendar, and the media schedule. There was a white board in the middle of the wall in the front of the room. Next to white board, there were words phrases cut out in the shape of sailboats, and they read as follows: effort, honesty, caring responsibility, and choices. Beside those sailboats cut outs, there was a small interchangeable sign that had the number of days till the end of the year exam (EOG). The next noticeable items were the traditional desks that were aligned in four long rows; one desk behind another. The teacher has an old school beige colored overhead projector that was positioned on the far-right side of the room.

**Classroom teacher D.** Teacher C introduced the researcher to classroom teacher D. The researcher shook hands with classroom teacher D and proceeded to follow the classroom teacher D to the teacher's desk. The researcher sat down at the teacher's desk while taking a quick glance as the students were coming in. As the researcher walked in, the first thing that was noticed was the students' work hanging up on the walls, a daily schedule, class rules, and a word wall. The teacher's desk was in the back corner, next to bright yellow storage cabinets. The students were seated at what is normally described as activity table aligned in four columns. Another eye-catching element in the classroom was the big multicolored rug that was royal blue, red, and yellow at the front of the room, but centered off the whiteboard. At the front of the room, there were long bulletin boards that looked magnetic. There were five stackable bins that had all kinds of papers in it. The bins were all labeled, one was white and labeled "extra copies" while the other ones were black and labeled as follows: previously homework sheets, morning messages, inbox/outbox, and calendar sheets.

**Classroom teacher E.** In this classroom, the researcher noticed the arrangement of the black top activity tables. There were two tables—12 to 14 feet long—shaped like an L on both sides on of the room. The overhead projector and desk were centered in the middle of both L shaped tables. The ceilings and three bulletin boards were displaying students work. There was a map displayed on one bulletin board and several inflated globes were hanging from the ceiling. There were no classroom rules displayed or classroom schedules.

**Classroom teacher F.** Classroom teacher F was waiting outside the door for the students to enter and the researcher arrived at the same time. The teacher greeted the students with light conversation and gave instructions as the students went to their seats. The researcher introduced herself, even though the teacher was aware of the researcher's arrival. In the south, it is courtesy

just to re-introduce to become acquainted. The researcher walked in and took a seat at the teacher's desk. As the researcher entered the room, the most noticeable thing was how neat, clean, and organized the classroom was. The room had bright and natural lighting and the theme colors were mostly primary colors with words written in black. The bulletin boards were to the right of the door, proceed to go around the room, and are listed as follows: the evidence board, comprehension vocabulary board, grammar skill board, student display board, comprehension strategies board, and Bloom's taxonomy board. The students were seated at four large black activity tables that were centered in the middle of the room. The students were facing the smart board that was located between the comprehension strategies board and the Bloom's taxonomy board. Next to the Bloom's board was a set of storage cabinets and next to them a set of windows. Next to the windows, there was the evidence board and then the students display board while the bulletin board was basically behind the students. Beside the student display board, there was a huge storage cabinet, which was basically on the back wall, and then the three bulletin boards that were connected on the back wall were the comprehension, vocabulary, and the grammar board. There were not any bulletin board denoting the rules or the classroom schedule.

**Observations.** Across all classrooms the researcher observed that there were a few disengaged students. It appeared as if the teachers continued to keep teaching and did not try to reengage those students who were disengaged. The researcher also noticed that there were no positive incentives visible to the students. There were not any reward systems for the students individually or collectively. The researcher noticed that one class had students in small groups, but they were grouped together with some students talking to each other.

Transitional periods between classes were very chaotic and noisy; each transition required about 10 minutes for students to get settled. No one had a visual clock next to a classroom schedule that denoted times changes or alarms for change of classes. Each teacher had a wrist watch and utilized the school bells for transitions. Only one teacher used their watch to have students clean up before the bell rang, but the bell still caught those students by a few minutes. Observations also revealed that only two teachers were prepared to teach as soon as the students walked in whereas in the other classes the students were idle, laughing, and playing while the teachers prepared for instruction.

All six teachers had their own way of managing their own classrooms. The layout of each teachers' classroom alluded to the teacher's personality as well as how long they have been teaching. All six teachers' classroom arrangements were very similar, but the classrooms of the least experienced of them had more color and decorations. From the observations, it looked like all the teachers expected students to behave independently without positive reinforcement or positive incentives, which would indicate rewarding students was not considered necessary.

### **Data Analysis**

**Coding.** The first stage of coding was performed with the data collected from the parent questionnaire. The process began by using open coding to create tentative labels (open codes) based on the meaning that emerged from the parents' answers. The next step was to perform axial coding to identify relationships between the open codes (Miles et al., 2014). As a result, the following categories were created: Typical Bedtime for Students, Problems Sleeping, Routine Bedtime, Types of TV Shows, Video Games, Types of Discipline Used, Last Dr Visit, Amount of Days on Video Games, Hours Spent Watching TV, and Type of Breakfast. Once the categories were typed in an excel spreadsheet as headings, parents' responses that exemplified

them were listed. Then the researcher began to use the constant comparison method in order to find similarities and differences in the themes (responses). Similar responses were identified and separated from the different ones and each column of responses was tallied up based on the total number of responses for each theme. Then the percentages for each category were generated. Based on those numerical percentages, a graph was created to give educators a visual idea of what their students' home life looked like.

The next stage of coding was the analysis of teachers' data. It was collected through a questionnaire, focus group questions, individual interviews (audio recorded), field notes, observations, teacher write-ups, and office referrals. The researcher worked with each piece of data in isolation and completed each coding process one by one to keep things organized. The first piece of data analyzed was the teachers' interviews. They were transcribed from the audio recordings and the researcher replayed the audio more than once to make sure nothing was missed from the interview. Next, the researcher looked over the transcribed interviews in order to apply the constant comparison method so as to find pattern similarities and differences that implied that there was a theme among teachers' responses (Saldaña, 2013). Once the similar responses were identified, the researcher highlighted them pink and separated them from the themes (responses) that were different. The latter were single responses that were not common or did not have an interconnection category. The researcher wrote the common codes (responses) in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet document.

Then the researcher repeated the same process with the focus group questions; looking again for developing themes, their interconnections, and categories of codes (Saldaña, 2013). When the researcher worked through to the third question of the focus group responses, she could see some developing themes. At that time, the researcher highlighted the similar themes in



the focus group in pink and then looked again to see if the un-highlighted responses had any commonality. Some of them became themes and were highlighted in light green. The researcher included both the light green highlighted responses and the highlighted pink ones in the Microsoft Excel document. After checking those responses again, three categories and several themes were created.

The researcher moved on to the next piece of data which was the teachers' questionnaires and read each teacher's response for understanding, readability, and clarity. Then she looked at each response again to look for reoccurring themes; specifically, for axial coding interconnection and linking categories in relation to teacher themes (Huberman, Miles, & Saldaña, 2013). The researcher had already identified three categories during the previous review and analysis. At that moment, the researcher began to use the constant comparison method, attempting to find similarities and differences in the themes (Huberman, Miles, & Saldaña, 2013). Once the similar teacher themes were identified, the researcher highlighted them in pink and separated them from the different themes, which were single responses that only one person gave. Then, the researcher looked at the questionnaires again looking for reoccurring themes (common responses, common paraphrases, and common statements). The researcher highlighted those in pink and added them to the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. From there, the researcher organized the main themes into categories, which ultimately produced a total of five main categories: Teacher Preparedness, Transitional Periods, Teacher Perception, Support, and Formal Education. The next cycle of the teachers' responses coding and analysis consisted of reexamining the questions, categories, and sub-categories for redundancy of responses. The responses that were irrelevant or reductant were eliminated. The researcher went back to the light green highlighted responses to see if there were common or interconnecting themes, or redundancy between the

focus group responses and the teacher questionnaires. Once that was done, some of the green highlighted responses became a main category under student themes. The researcher put check mark over the green highlighted themes that became a student theme to keep things organized. See appendix F for the teacher themes and category break down.

The third stage of the coding process was focused on the student themes, which meant the analysis of field notes, observations, teacher write-ups, and office referrals. The teacher write-ups and office referrals were 6x4 cuts of paper which made it easy to organize and code the data. The first thing that the researcher did was separate the two piles based on the description. The second step was to make sense of the raw data grouped in the write-ups stack, utilizing the open coding method (Huberman, Miles, & Saldaña, 2013). The researcher read each response for clarity and understanding, and then performed a second reading to search for themes in relations to student misbehavior. Next the researcher highlighted in pink the teacher write-ups that had something to do with student misbehavior and stacked them in another pile labeled “student misbehavior”. The rest of the themes were highlighted in green. Then the researcher included each identified student misbehavior in the themes written in the spreadsheet and continued to work through the pile. Once the data of the pile was complete, the researcher began to look for similarities and differences again; attempting to reduce repetition. The researcher utilized axial coding to look for interconnecting and linking categories and, as result, three categories were formed (Huberman, Miles, & Saldaña, 2013). After that, she looked back through the pile of write-ups that were highlighted in green to see if there were any potential new category or theme. The same process was repeated on the office referrals.

Once that previous process was completed, the researcher proceeded to analyze the teacher observations. Each observation was reread once for clarity and a second time to look

specifically for reoccurring themes (common responses, common paraphrases, and common statements). The researcher highlighted those new themes in pink, added them to the Excel spreadsheet, and organized them into categories. A constant comparison method was then used to analyze the textual data and, as a result, codes, themes, patterns, and categories were created. Two additional categories were formed from the classroom observations. At the end, a total of five categories and eighteen main themes were developed from all the student data collected, as appendix G shows.

## **Intervention**

Based on the data analysis, Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) and Class Maps Consultation strategy (Doll, 2008) were selected to design an intervention to help teachers deal with student misbehavior at Public School 1. Both approaches were used to create a desktop manual that teachers could use when misbehavior happened (see Appendix H). The Class Maps Consultation strategy was chosen because it focused on listing the behaviors in sub-categories and that could help teachers navigate through the possible actions. Once all the behaviors were viewed and grouped, a discussion of potential intervention strategies were identified, and then a plan of intervention was formed to help guide the educators. PBIS was also chosen because it focused on small whole group modifications and stressed positive reinforcement and a reward system. Its strategies could also be utilized as a matinee program and, therefore, that is suited for long-term usage. The combination of the two approaches provided the educators both student and teacher actions to identify and do. This was considered necessary because the identified problems were not limited only to students, but also had to do with the transitioning of the educators to shift their classroom tone, their responses to their students, and the lack of reinforcement of positive behavior. The researcher decided to create an

easy tool to use that could help teachers understand the correlation between classroom management and students' behavior. That tool was a desktop manual.

**Development of the intervention.** The researcher analyzed interventions that had been used in past research and been proven to work for problem behaviors and developed an intervention that addressed the specific needs of the population based on the Class Maps Consultation strategy and the Positive Behavior Intervention System (Doll, 2008). She looked at the main categories identified after the data analysis and looked up in those previous studies to see what was done before to address that specific category. Once the key behaviors were listed in the sub-categories of the behaviors, the researcher could determine which attribute was a teacher theme and which was a student one.

When all the behaviors had been viewed and grouped, a set of potential intervention strategies was identified, and a plan of intervention was formed. The intervention was written into a quick-to-use desktop manual so the teachers would know what to do when each type of student misbehavior happened. In short, the positive behavior intervention program applied had suggestions on what intervention should be used according to the behavior exhibited or the problem that was being experienced.

**Implementation of the intervention.** The researcher met with the focus group and collectively discussed what the findings were. The researcher presented the fifth-grade educators the analysis of the data so that the teachers were able to visualize their classes as a unit and individually and see precisely where the problems arose from. The researcher discussed the observations and the teacher journals one-on-one. During the meeting, the educators expressed their concerns, what they struggled with in the class, and what they wanted to see changed in their classrooms. The researcher explained potential management strategies that could be

utilized. She also discussed what had been identified as ineffective classroom management and how to move forward by incorporating a strategic plan that let them change their classroom management. The researcher discussed the desktop manual that the educators could use to remind them of alternatives that could be utilized within the classroom instead of teachers' write-ups that result in students' suspensions. The researcher passed the desktop manual to each teacher that agreed to participate in the study.

**Data collection after the intervention.** After two months, the teachers' write-ups and referrals were gathered and analyzed again to see if any change had been happened. The results are presented in the next section.

### **Presentation of the Data and Results**

The main research question of this study was:

*How do fifth grade teachers describe their experiences with classroom management at an elementary school with high principal referral and suspension rates?*

To answer it, the data gathered was analyzed and the results are presented in this section.

Through coding and analyzing the responses from the questionnaires and interviews, several themes emerged. The researcher developed themes for both the students and the teachers. The themes were (a) noncompliance (b) off-task (c) disruptive behavior (d) loud outburst and (e) classroom behavior management techniques.

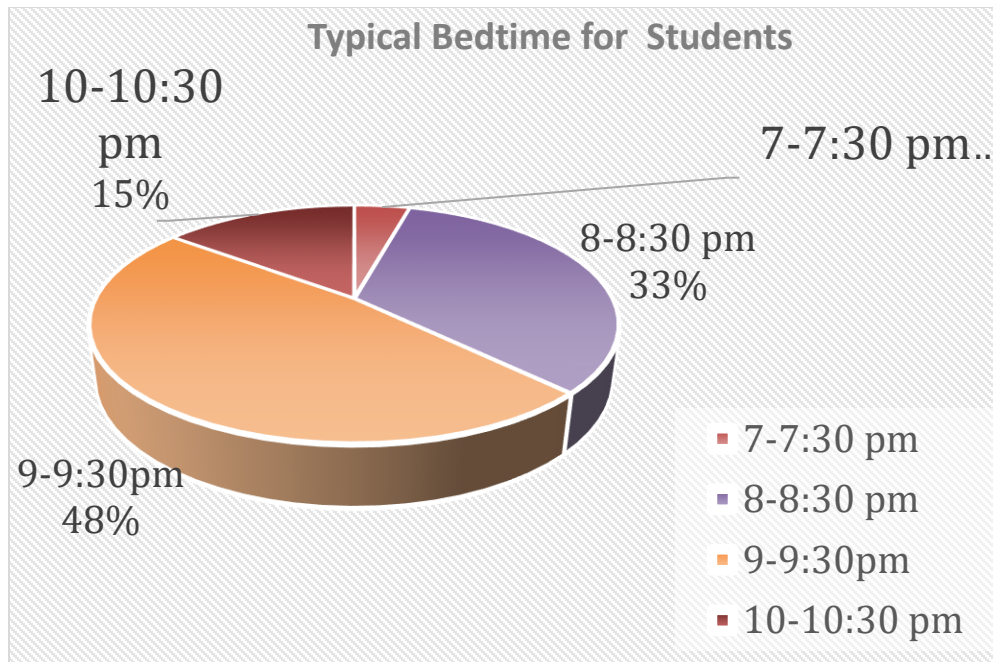
Table 2

*Key Themes*

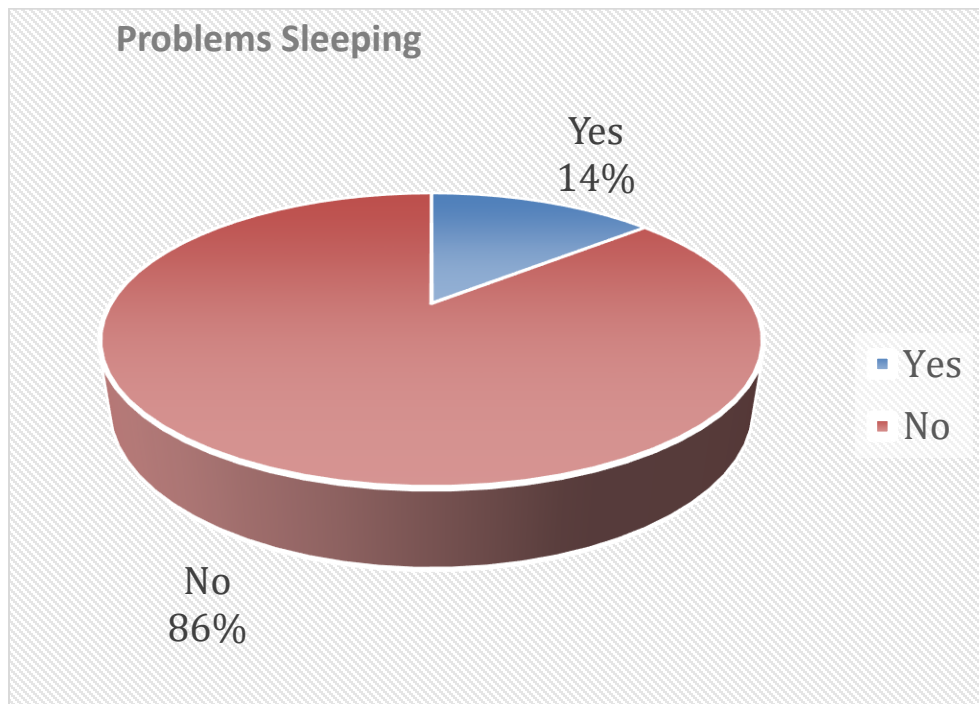
Theme	Definition
Non-compliant behavior	Failure to comply with teachers' instructions
Off-task	Student not working on assignment/ not actively engaged
Disruptive behavior	Any behavior that interrupts the learning / instruction of others
Loud outburst	Yelling, loudly talking back to teacher/peers, arguing, blurting
Classroom behavior	Training techniques utilized to help reinforce positive behavior
Management techniques	recipients eliminate negative behavior within the classroom

**Findings Related to Students**

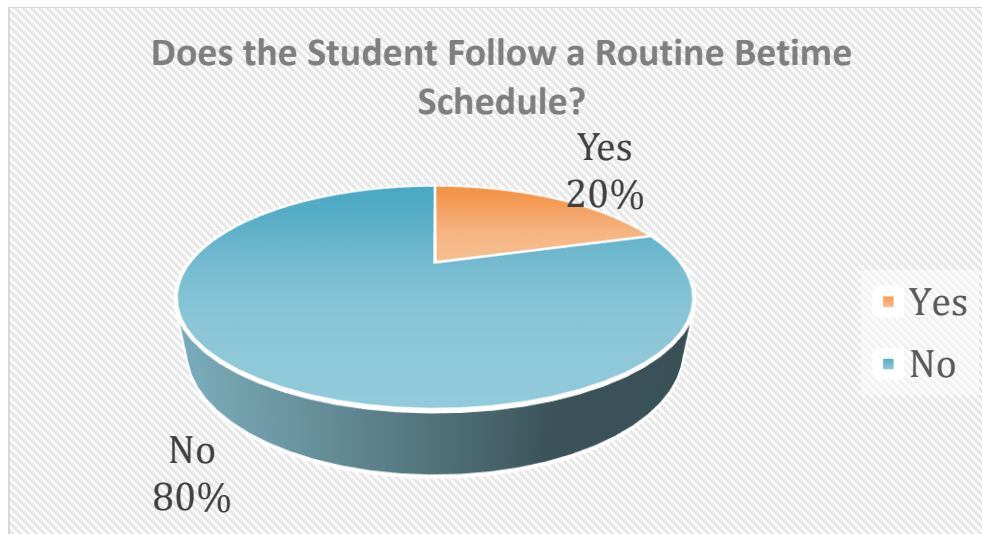
Since Ramsey (2009) reported that differential sleep times can lead to children's misbehaviors and Rosenberg (2011) found that sleep problems are related to behavior problems, the parent questionnaire included questions about the typical bedtime for students and if they had sleep problems. The findings do not support those claims because 85% of students went to sleep not later than 9:30pm, which assured at least 8 hours of sleep (Figure 2), 86% of parents reported their children did not have problems to sleep (Figure 3), and 80% said their children followed a routine bedtime schedule (Figure 4). The results of the parent questionnaire have been graphed in a pie chart in order to give a better view.



*Figure 2.* Typical bedtime for students.



*Figure 3.* Problems sleeping.



*Figure 4.* Does the student follow a routine bedtime schedule?

Ramsey (2009), Roundtree (2011), Rosenberg (2011), and Shaw (2013) found that what children watch on TV (especially violent TV content), and the time watching TV or playing videos may affect their behavior. Based on that claim, the parent questionnaire included questions about the type of TV programs children watched, the number of hours watching TV, if the children play videos and, if so, the frequency of playing. The results showed that the most watched type of program was cartoons (32%) followed by comedy (20%) and pre-teen programs (18%) as shown in Figure 4. This may support Shaw's claim that fast-paced cartoons may lead to misbehavior. Figure 4 shows that 43% of the children spent not more than two hours watching TV and only 2% spent more than three hours and those results do not seem support the claim that more hours of TV watching can cause children's misbehavior. Regarding video games, the findings may support that video games and misbehavior can be related because 79% of the parents reported that their children played videos games (Figure 7) and that 44% played them between four and seven days while 41% did it between one and three days (Figure 8).



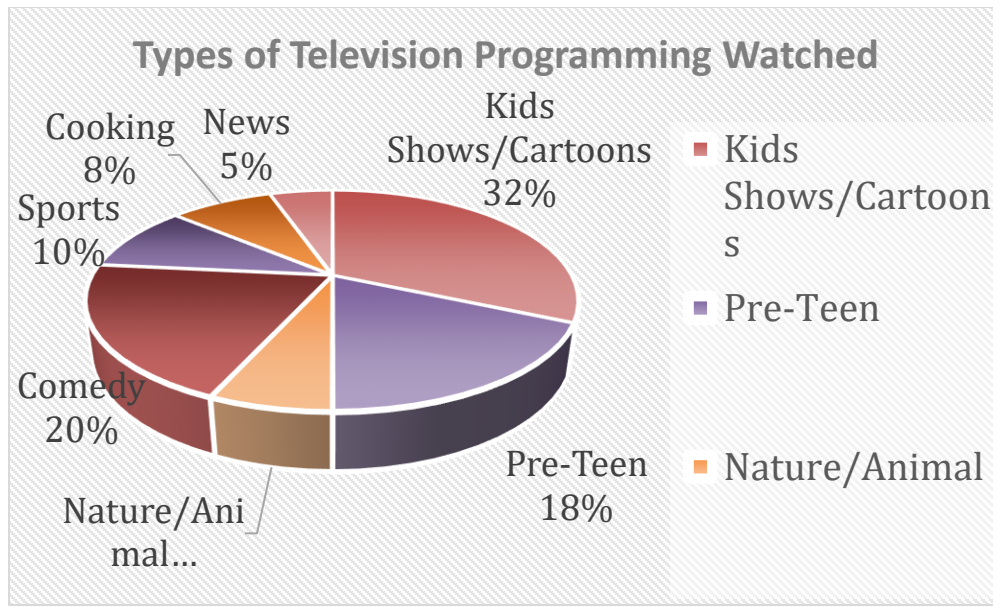


Figure 5. Types of television programming watched.

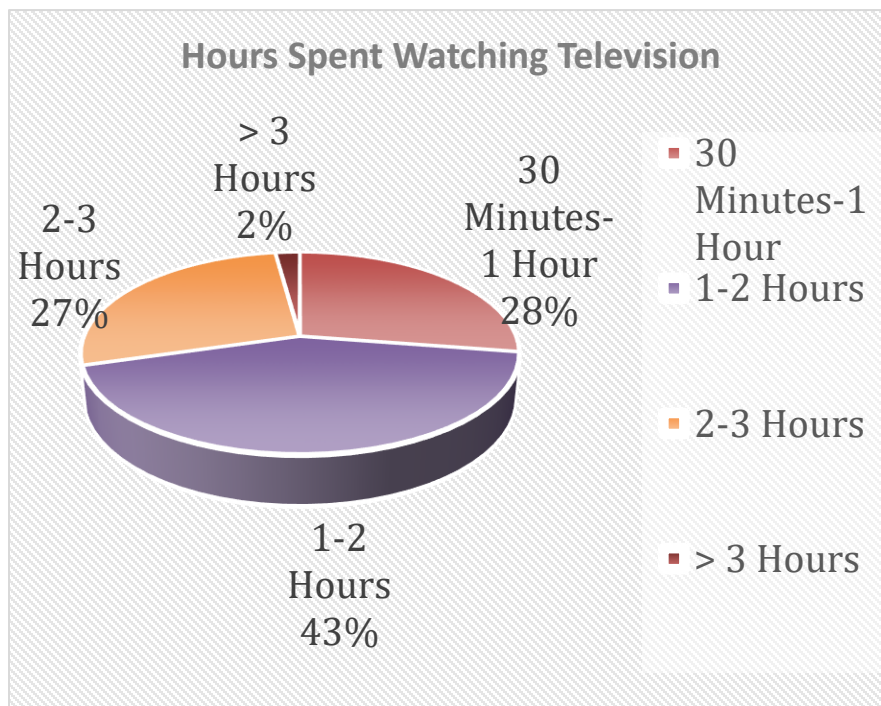


Figure 6. Hours spent watching television.

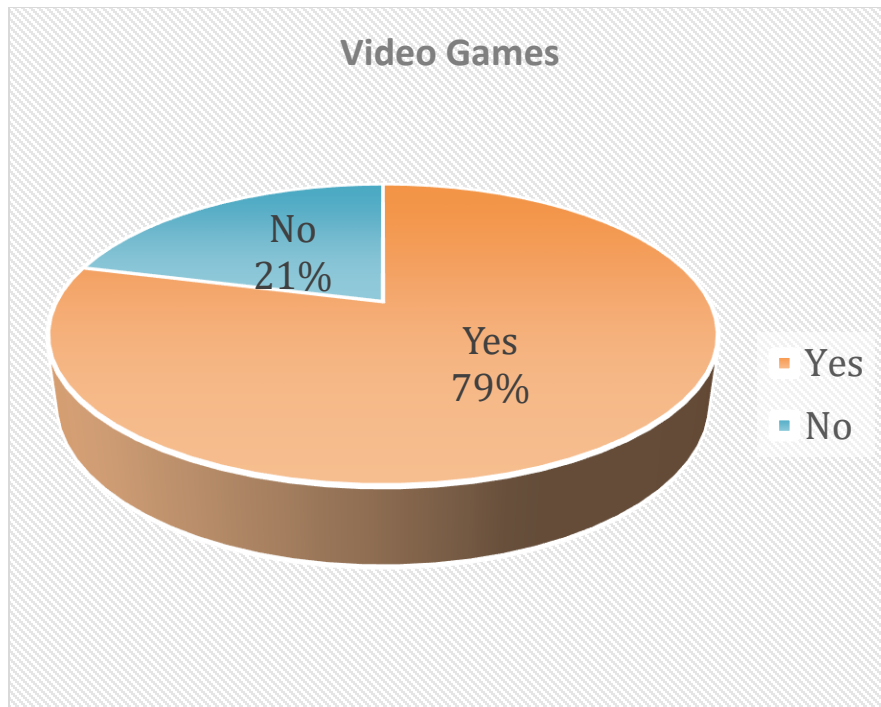


Figure 7. Video games.

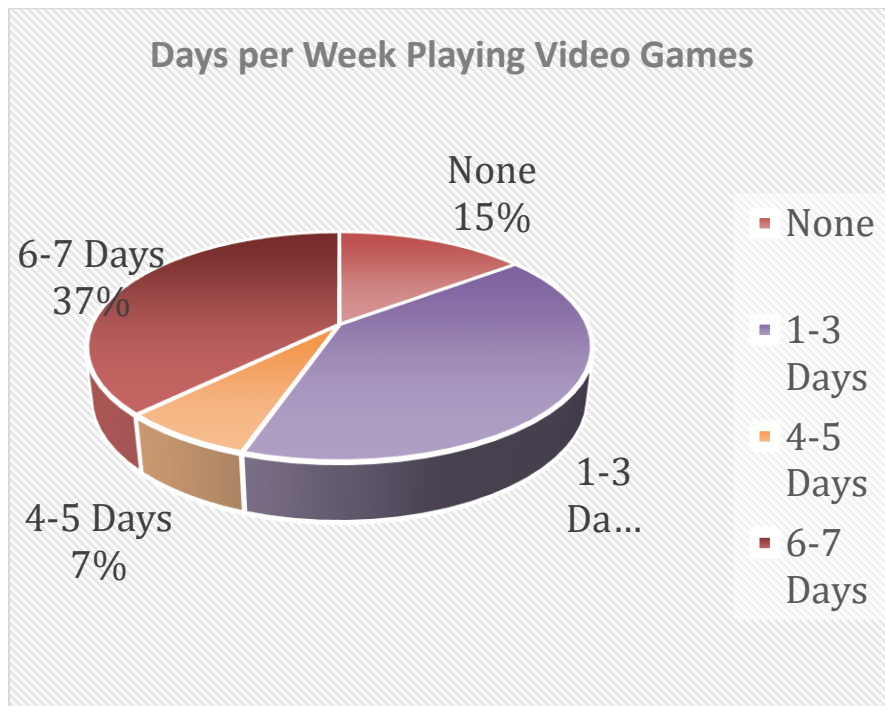


Figure 8. Days per week playing video games.

According to Sitnick et al. (2014), knowing if the child had been disciplined before, and the type of discipline applied, could attribute to how the child behaved socially. Based on that, the parent questionnaire included questions about the discipline children were exposed to. The findings presented in Figure 9 showed that 86% of the children were under a type of discipline focused on the restriction of privileges and items and this fact was considered when suggesting the kind of strategies teachers could use to manage their classrooms.

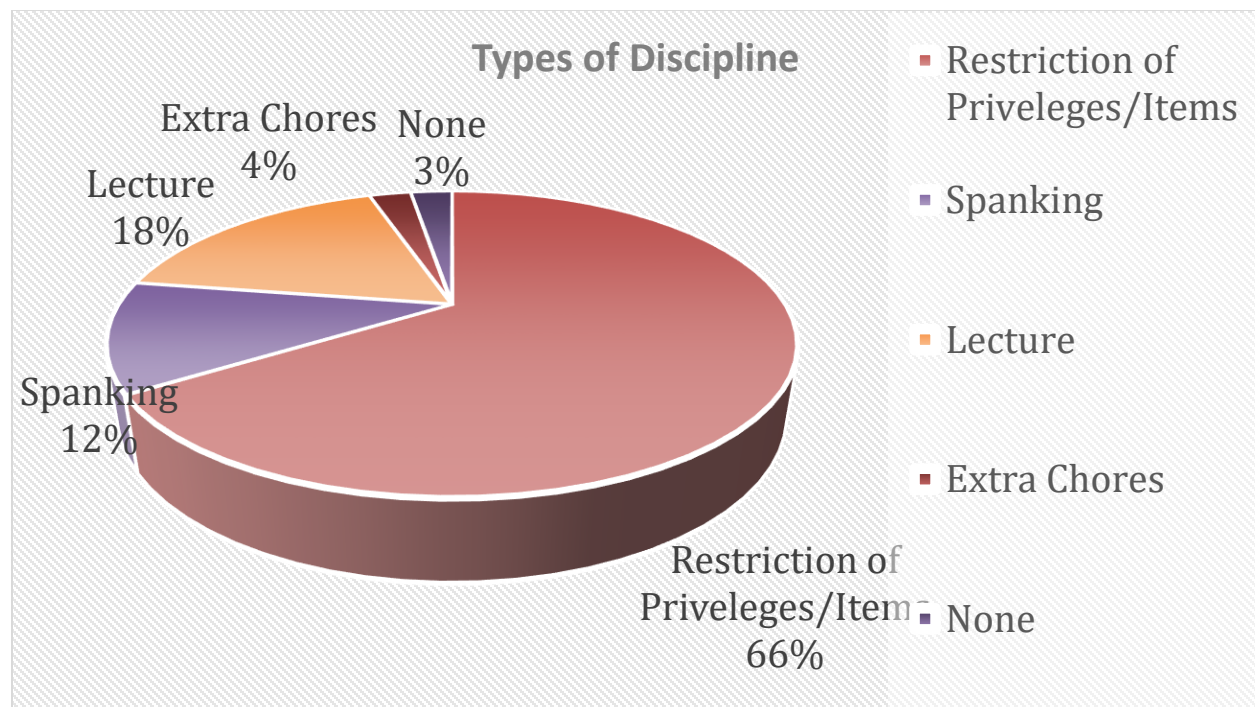


Figure 9. Types of discipline.

Nemours (2017) explains that an annual physician's health examination is vital to ensure the child is growing and developing normally while Kesztyus et al. (2017) pointed out that public schools should offer free regular breakfast at the start of the school day to keep every child motivated. These claims were behind the questions about the frequency of visits to the physician (10) and the type of breakfast students took (Figure 11). 97% of the students had visited the physician in a period not longer than 1 year and all students took breakfast (50% hot food and

50% cereals/bar/bagels). That meant that two important requirements for children development (health and food) had been satisfied.

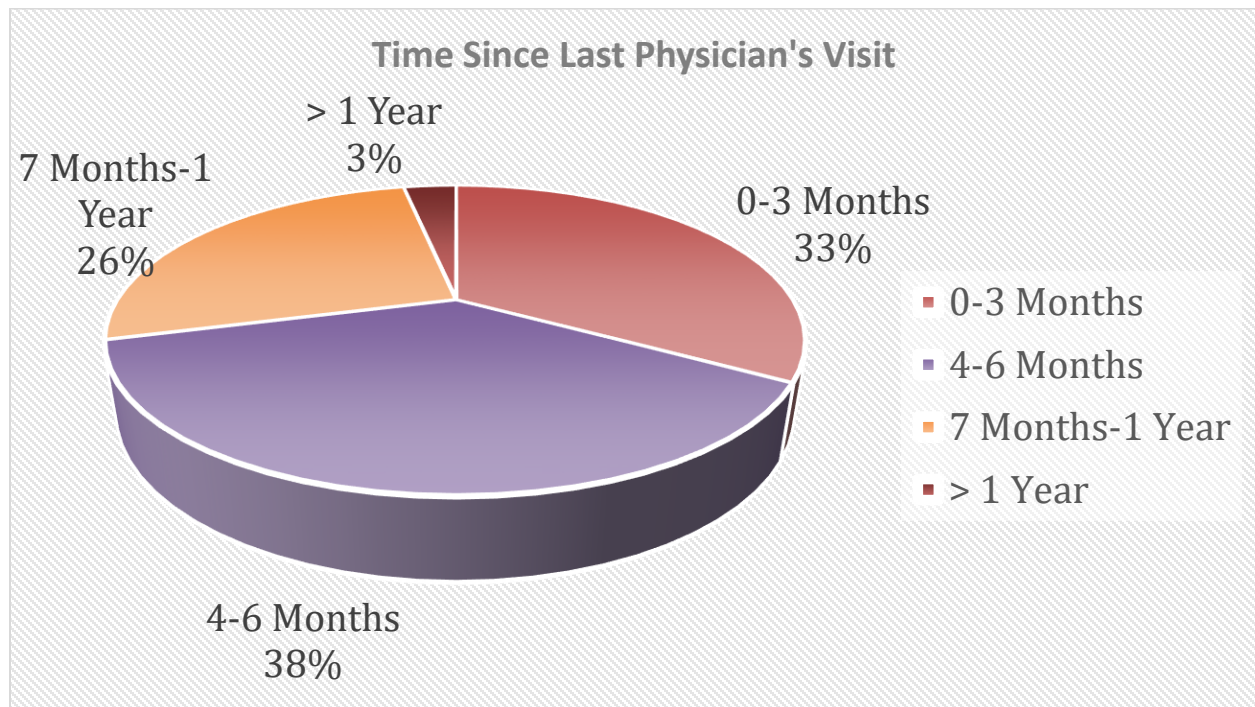


Figure 10. Time from last physician's visit.

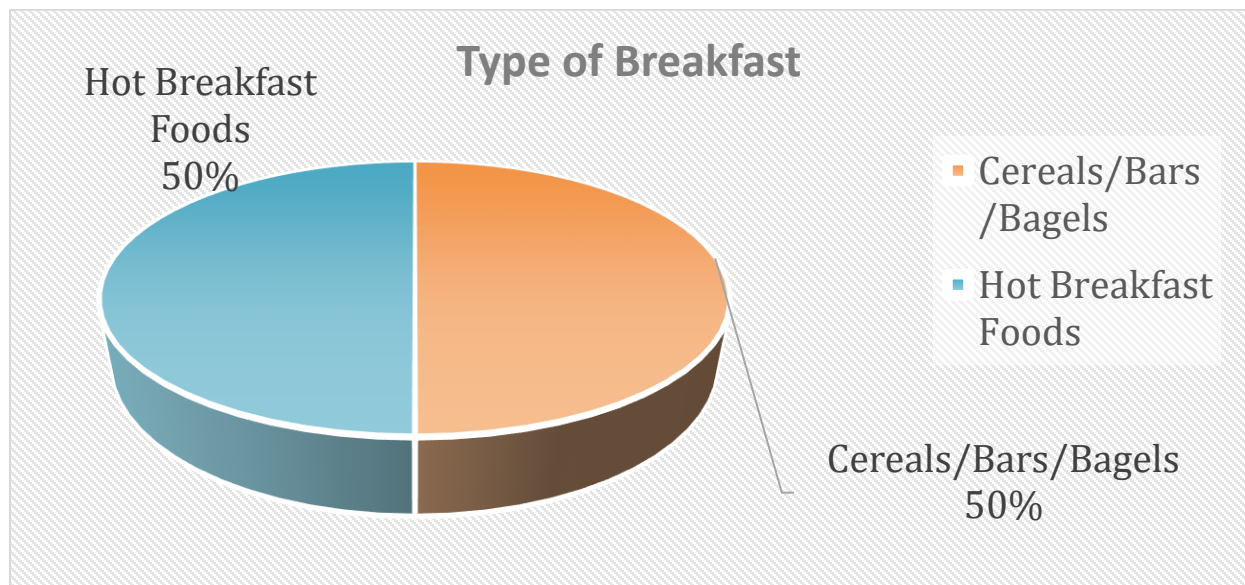


Figure 11. Type of breakfast.

The analysis of the coding showed that the student key themes were non-complaint-

behavior, off-task, disruptive behavior, and loud outburst (see Table 3). Noncompliant is defined as failure to comply with teachers' instructions. One of the examples of noncomplaint behaviors were exhibited when students refused to complete classroom assignments after given instructions, or failure to follow teachers' verbal instructions. Noncompliant behavior also covered when the educator asked the students a question and he or she refused to respond or participate in the group discussions.

Being off-task task is identified when a student is not working on an assignment or not actively engaged in the classroom. An example of off-task task is when a student is not working on requesting assignments because he or she is just sitting still for a few minutes. Off-task can also be identified as a student constantly fidgeting with their fingers, hair, glasses or nose for more than five minutes. Students were also labeled off-task task when they would day dream for five minutes or more. Another example of being off-task task was when students were pulling out other items out of their desk during the middle of an assignment and be engaged with whatever that was pulled out of the desk for five minutes or more. Disruptive behavior is any behavior that interferes with other students learning. One of the examples of disruptive behavior was when students slam their books on the desk to startle other students during the middle of a classroom instruction. Another example of student disruptive behavior when students are making loud fart noises, giggling or laughing loud, chatting with their peers. Another example of disruptive behavior is when students throw spit balls, erasers, paper airplanes or balled up paper at their peers during instruction.

Loud outburst is when one or more student are yells at the teacher or to a peer. Loud outburst is also identified when a student yells their response back to a teacher or peer in response to something that was asked. Loud outburst was also identified when two students

begin to yell back and forth at each other with or without reason during small group instruction. Loud outburst also covers when a student burst out loud with laughter or provokes the entire class to laugh loudly during classroom instructing. Loud outburst was identified when a student makes loud noises like, burping, passing gas loudly. All the loud outbursts were typically randomly done during anytime of the day while the students were in class quiet. Table 3 shows the student key themes.

Table 3

*Student Key Themes*

Theme	Definition
Non-compliant behavior	Failure to comply with teachers' instructions
Off-task	Student not working on assignment/ not actively engaged
Disruptive behavior	Any behavior that interrupts the learning / instruction of others
Loud outburst	Yelling, loudly talking back to teacher/peers, arguing, blurting

**Findings Related to Teachers**

The analysis of the teacher questionnaires, interviews, journals, and classroom observations provided information about what the teachers considered misbehavior and how they responded to it. Table 4 shows the kind of actions that each teacher labelled as misbehavior. Table 4 also demonstrates the similarities and differences of student behavior that they experienced. All the teachers identified what they experienced to be non-complaint behaviors in their classrooms. Teachers A, C, D, and E had students that exhibited loud outburst in their classes. Teachers A, B, E, F had students that did not follow instructions consistently or refused to follow written or verbal instructions. Teachers A, D, and E had students that argued with peers within the classroom. Some teachers viewed students getting out of their seat as a problem

and in this case only teacher A described it as a problem. Teachers B and C had students who exhibited a lack of motivation, which is also commonly known as the inward drive to perform. Teachers B, C, and D, experienced their students being off-task task, not completing their work, and staying actively engaged. Teachers C and D had students that talked back in a disrespectful manner or responded to the teachers' request with inappropriate comments. Only teacher C experienced her students playing during classroom instruction or students playing inappropriately. Even though all the teachers had the same idea of what they considered misbehavior, not all of them experienced the same types of misbehavior within their classrooms.

Table 4

*Student Non-compliant Behaviors within the Class*

Participant Code	Response
A	Loud outburst, arguing with peers, getting out of seat, not following instructions
B	Lack of motivation, off-task task, not completing work, non-engaged, not following instructions
C	Playing, non-engaged, loud outburst, Lack of motivation, off-task task, talking back to teacher
D	Loud outbursts, not working, arguing with peers, talking back to teacher
E	Loud out blurts, yelling at peers, not following instructions
F	Yelling, not following instructions

The Table 5 shows how many times each educator had to address what they identified as non-compliant behavior within a classroom session of 90 minutes. Non-complaint behavior was identified as a main theme and outlined as a specific category in Table 5. Non-compliant

behavior is defined as the student's refusal to comply or carry out the teachers verbal or written instructions.

Table 5

*Number of Times Non-compliant Behaviors Are Addressed*

Participant Code	Response
A	10 or more times
B	10 or more times
C	10 or more times
D	6 times
E	Up to 5 times
F	Up to 5 times

What the educators identified as their main classroom management strategies is presented in Table 6. It was evident that most of the educators used in-school suspensions and office referrals as their main behavioral classroom method. The finding also helped the researcher understand what the educators identified as classroom management and took it into account to create the desktop manual.



Table 6

*Teacher Main Method of Classroom Management before Intervention*

Participant Code	Response
A	Teacher's write-up, office referrals, in school suspension, verbal cues
B	Phone call to parents, one verbal warning, teacher's write-up, office referrals, in-school suspension
C	Silent lunch, in-school suspension, office referral, verbal cues
D	Teacher's write-up, office referrals, in school suspension, phone call to parents
E	Office referral and in-school suspension
F	Teacher's write-up, office referrals, in school suspension

*Note.* Appendix A (Question 7).

What teachers thought about the classroom management strategies that could be used to address student misbehavior is presented in Table 7.

Table 7

*Teachers' Opinions on Classroom Management Strategies and Behavior Approaches*

Opinions	SA	A	N	D	SD
Do you feel students are affected by the noncompliant behavior of the few disruptive students your need to discuss the behaviors?	A,B,C,D,E,F				
Improved classroom management strategies would improve student academic success	A,B,C,D			E,F	
Effective classroom management strategies would improve teachers job satisfaction	A,B,C,D,E,F				

Table 7

*Teachers' Opinions on Classroom Management Strategies and Behavior Approaches*  
(continued)

Opinions	SA	A	N	D	SD
A desktop reference manual with research-based classroom strategies would be a beneficial tool for teachers	A,B,C,D,E			F	
Teachers receive adequate training in dealing with difficult students					A,B,C,D,E,F
Disruptive student behavior interferes with learning	A,B,C,D,E,F				
Disruptive student negatively affects the overall classroom climate	A,B,C,D,E,F				
Teachers experience stress because of daily interactions with noncompliant students	A,B,C		D,E,F		
Current strategies are ineffective in minimizing student disruption	B,C		D,E,F		A

*Note.* SA-strongly agree, A-Agree, N-neutral, D-Disagree, SD -strongly disagree. Items in Appendix B

When the teachers who participated in the study spoke on the topic of fifth grade classroom management, everyone had their own opinion and understanding of what behavior classroom management was. The findings showed that:

- The main common factor was that all six teachers viewed behavior classroom management as having discipline without positive reinforcement and consequences for negative behavior.

- No rewards were offered for desired behavior.
- Teachers A, B, C and D did not have any formal education in the undergraduate degree program on classroom behavior management and that was reflected in their conception of it stated above. The North Carolina teacher educational programs that the educators attended had classes that focuses on how to teach and arrange room, child psychology, child development, but nothing concerning how to reinforce positive behavior or how to get students to follow instruction.
- Teacher A stated that, when additional education was achieved during the Master program, there was one class that was offered for classroom behavior management. That particular class focused on setting the tone of the classroom and how to enhance learning and understanding of the difficult child.
- Teacher D and E took one class on classroom management that focused on student's behavior and classroom management.
- As reflected in Table 1, the last two teachers were much newer at teaching and they also taught extra-curriculum subjects.
- All six educators stated that all their strategies that were learned and utilized came from trying different sources and reading books.
- All six teachers explained that no one ever really explained the connection of student behavior and classroom management.
- All six teachers confirmed that students' constant misbehavior was stressful and took them away from the entire learning environment. They also expressed that constant distractions interfered with the education of the students who were following instructions and desired to learn.

- Students misbehaving also overall affects how the teachers stayed on task with their pacing guide (time schedule) and students misbehavior took time away from instruction, which in turn made the educators look inefficient.
- Five teachers mentioned that there was always room for educational, and professional improvement.
- All six teachers mentioned that they had effective classroom management for students, but five of them desired to learn more because education is an evolving practice.
- The educators also mentioned that the students of today are from a different generation and it is evident that their interests are completely different from the ones of the students five years ago.
- At times educators felt like there were not many alternates to utilize.
- Five educators explained that having a desktop manual would be helpful in building and sustain their proactive responses to students on compliance because it would provide other strategies that they had not be accustomed to. There was one teacher who did not feel like a manual was needed since there was not one specific thing that would work for each child and he felt it was normal for students to misbehave.
- All of the teachers agreed that they had room for development and growth as educators.

The results that answer the following research questions are presented below.

- *What behavioral techniques can be implemented to decrease behavioral problems at the fifth-grade level at Public School 1?*

- *What classroom management strategies can fifth grade teachers at Public School 1 use to decrease principal referral and student suspension rates?*

After implementing the intervention, data was collected to know its effect over the teachers' ability to manage students' noncompliant behaviors. The data was collected through the analysis of observations, teachers' write-ups, in-suspensions, and office-referrals and the findings are presented below.

Table 8 shows what each teacher changed in his or her classroom after the intervention to make their classroom a positive, proactive classroom instead of a re-active classroom operating negatively as it was before intervention like it is presented in Table 6. After the intervention, teacher A incorporated assigned seats into small groups and rotated her small groups every 15 min to keep her students alert and actively engaged. Teacher B intergraded constantly walking around each students' desk and also assigned seats and incorporated small work groups. She also purposely set the expectations at the beginning of class and offered verbal praise such as "good job" or "awesome work." Teacher C incorporated silent lunch for three days for any fraction misbehavior as well as assigned seats. While walking the classroom continuously, visual and verbal cues were incorporated in order to get and keep students' attention. Teacher D set the tone before students entered the room and made daily declarations of what was going to happen in the classroom before the students began their assignments. Assigned seats and the discussion of the basic classroom rules were incorporated daily as a reminder of student's behavior and educational expectations as was done by teacher E, who incorporated daily visual rules and verbal expressions of student expectations while teacher F incorporated better supervision and clear written instructions for all assignments.

Table 8

*Classroom Management Strategies Employed after Intervention*

Participant Code	Response
A	Assigned seats into small groups. Change group every 15 min to keep students alert and engaged
B	Constantly walk around each student desk. Assign seats and small work groups. Offer verbal praise such as good job or awesome work. Set expectation the first day of class
C	Silent lunch for three days for any fraction. Assign seats and walk the classroom continuously. Use visual and verbal cues to get and keep students' attention
D	Set the tone before students enter the room. Make a declaration of what is going to happen in the classroom before students start. Assigned seats and discussion of basic rules daily
E	Daily rules and expectation of class session.
F	Supervision and clear instructions

*Note.* Appendix B (questions 3 and 16).

Table 9 lists the interventions used from the manual and presents the relationship between the problem and the recommendation being implemented. It also shows what the recommendations were for each teacher, based on the data taken from observations, interviews, and questionnaires. The intervention strategies were the specific instructions given to the teacher to attempt resolve the problem addressed.

Table 9

*Data Collection in Relation to Recommendation, Development, and Implementation*

Responses from	Problem addressed	Teacher	Intervention strategy
Observations	Students unaware of expectations	A,B,C,D,E,F	Hang large classroom clock in front of classroom, post schedule and rules.
Interviews and focus groups	Lack of student motivation	A,B,C,D,E,F	Establish reward system. Drop temp to 68-69 degrees. Increase room lighting and increase/add bright colors. Show students work off.
Focus groups, questionnaires	Noncompliance of students	A,B,C,D,E,F	Open communication up by texting, parents and/or grandparents. Send classroom invitations to parents/grandparents by email/phone/text.
Observations prior to students entering	Teacher unpreparedness and student idleness	A,B,C,D,E,F	Quick 2-5 mins assignment on desk/blackboard prior to students entering.
Observations	Disruptions, chaos during transitions	A,B,C,D,E,F	Give 5-7 min announcement of classes changing (transitional phrase or bell before bell).
Focus groups, interviews, observations, questionnaires	Student off-task task/non-complaint, disruptive behavior, loud outburst, talking back, not following instructions, talkative.	A,B,C,D,E,F	Call students' full name out and ask: what classroom room rule are you breaking? Redirect with a compliment or by requesting a task. Recite instructions. Assigned seats and place students that are easily off-task to the front of class. Have student state classroom rule. Be attentive, walking around room & looking. Remind students of parental agreement (who wants me to call mom/dad /grand-mother /grandad. Call student by name. Relocate disruptive student to another class. Request student remain after school one hour to work with after school teacher.

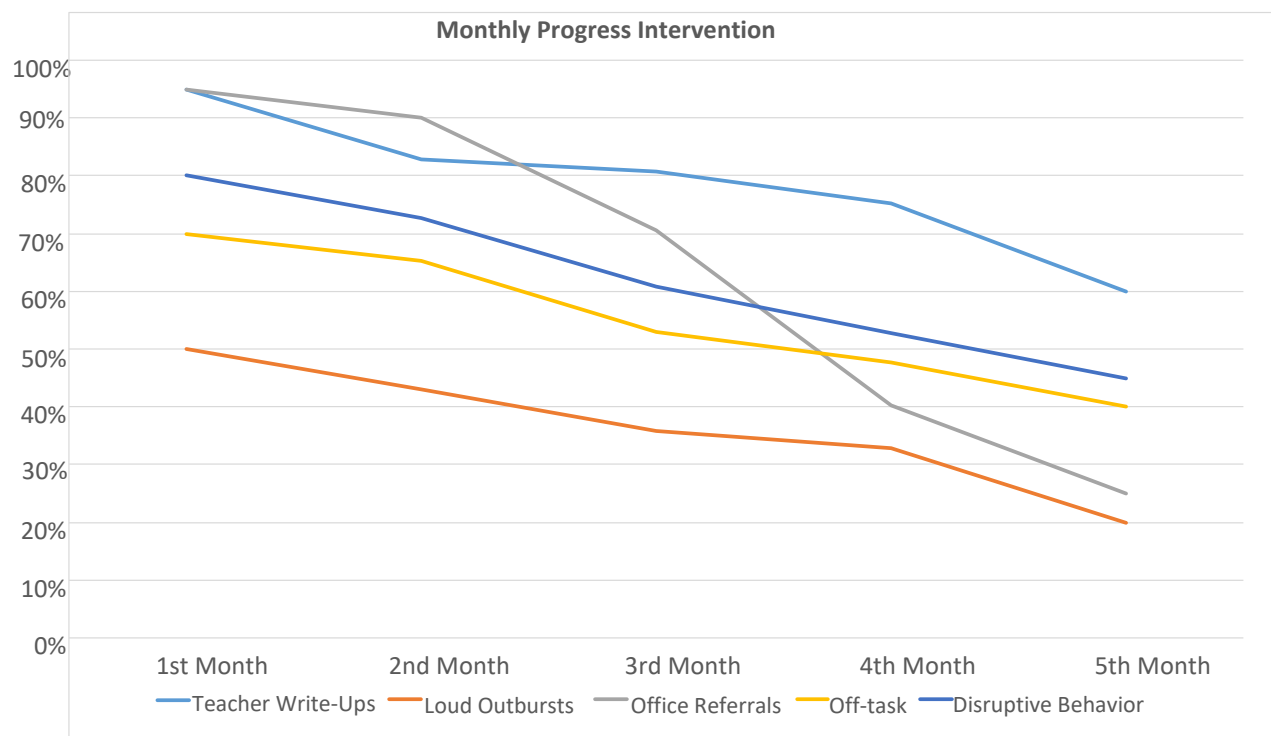
The last research question asked:

*What can fifth grade education do to bridge the gap between theory and practice in behavior management?*

In relation to the effects of the intervention applied, it is possible to conclude there was an improvement of the way teachers handled the behavior problems. The analysis showed that

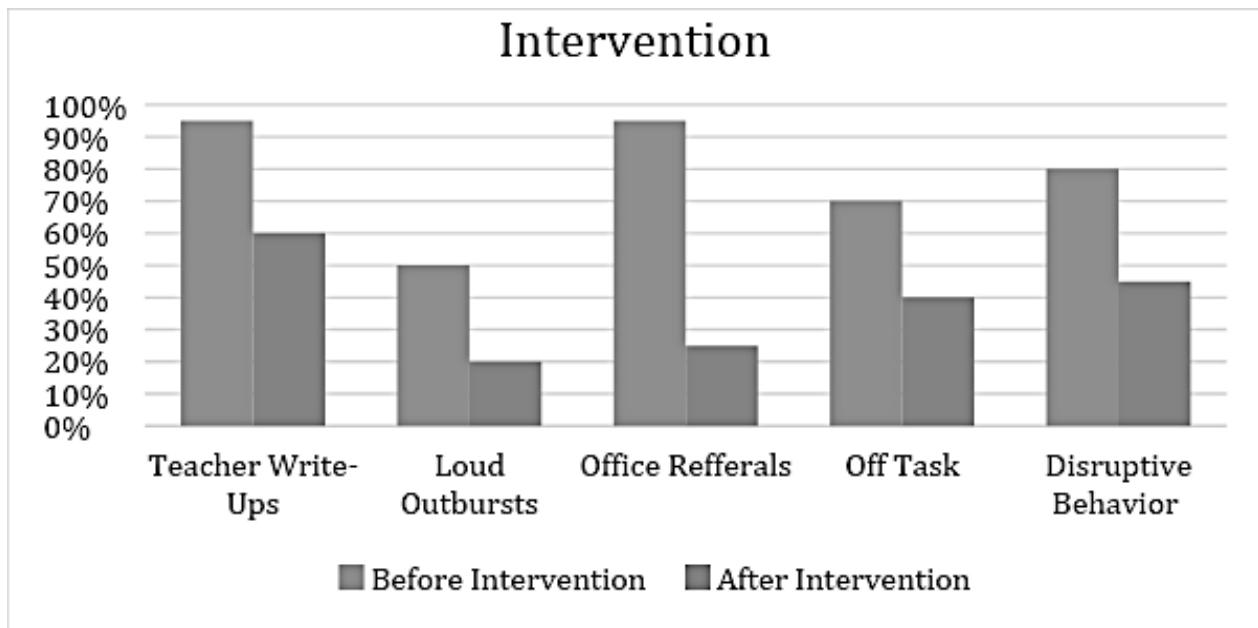
during the academic year 2015–2016, 1,000 students were suspended from the studied school for one to three days (North Carolina Public Schools, 2017). Short-term suspensions were issued for non-threatening or nonserious violations prior to interventions. During interventions, there were not any out-of-school suspensions. The fourth month data revealed that the behavior strategies were successful in reducing in-school suspensions and there were noticeable changes since the teacher write-ups decreased from 95% to 75.25% by the fourth month and the students' loud outburst decreased from 50% to 20%. Student office referrals decreased from 95% to 25%. Students being off-task decreased from 70% to 40%. Students' disruptive behavior decreased from 80% to 45%. Normally principal referral leads to student suspensions; however, the office referrals decreased to 25% and they did not lead to any school suspensions.

Figure 12 describes the monthly decrease of the disruptive behaviors while Figure 13 compares the percentages of those behaviors before and after the intervention.



*Figure 12.* Monthly progress of disruptive behaviors.





*Figure 13.* Comparison of disruptive behaviors.

The results of this study provide educators with alternatives to handle student misbehavior instead of setting in-school suspensions and office referrals that will be eventually reported to the state of NC. The educators were trained on how to use the desk top manual during one meeting. The desktop manual had a list of interventions that can be utilized in the classroom to help the educator be proactive rather than reactive when dealing with situations in which students misbehaved.

### **Chapter Summary**

This action research study was designed to identify behavior techniques and effective modern-day classroom management methods that could be utilized to address the high student suspensions and office referrals at a rural NC school. The researcher identified what was causing the behavioral problems that were leading up to teacher office referrals and school suspension and developed applicable solutions to decrease student suspensions and office referrals. The teachers were supported with a quick reference manual to aid them in their behavior management strategies in the classroom.

There were six main areas of behavior that needed to be addressed; these emerged from the data collection: disruptive behavior, loud outburst, off-task, office referrals, training, and classroom preparedness. The behavioral themes were a direct result of the teacher themes and the teacher themes were a result of the lack of training, knowledge of how to utilize classroom behavior management. Each main behavioral problem was centered around not knowing how to simply change their environment to fit the current students' needs. With proper training teachers learn how to prevent, deescalate behavioral problems, and eliminate excessive teacher write-ups that lead to school suspensions. In order to change any behavior, one must understand and have a working knowledge of how to change and shape behavior that will provide a response to learner performance, validation, reassurance, or affirmation (NCSP, 2016). These themes related to all six teachers who participated in this study. These themes will be discussed in relation to the literature and research in the next chapter.

In Chapter 4, the researcher presented data collection, and data analysis of results. In Chapter 5 a summary of the study, findings and conclusions, theoretical implications, practical implications, future implication, recommendation for future research and recommendation for practice are discussed. It also presents the researcher's perception about the study, data collection, and the analysis process.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusions and Discussion**

This chapter includes a discussion of findings, conclusions, limitations and recommendations of the action research study. The results are discussed and analyzed in relation to the literature review presented in Chapter 2 and the researcher's interpretation, analysis, and evaluation of the results are also provided. Further, findings in connection relationship to the existing research, the study's limitations, the benefits or contribution to new research in the field of education as well as any unplanned outcomes are shared. In summary, this chapter contains how the answers to the research questions align with the purpose of the study and its conceptual framework.

### **Summary of the Findings**

The purpose of this action research study was to identify behavior techniques and effective modern-day classroom management methods that can be utilized in the classroom. The study was designed to understand what was causing the behavioral problems that were leading up to high incidences of teacher office referrals and school suspensions, based upon what was going on at the school and professionals' perspectives on classroom and classroom behavior management. There were five main teachers' themes that emerged from the teacher's data: preparedness, perception, transitional periods, support, and formal education. The teacher themes reflected what the educators experienced and had control over in their classrooms; these impacted the student themes.

There were also five main student themes that emerged from the data: disruptive behavior, loud outburst, off-task, noncompliant, and behavior management techniques (consequences). The student themes were behaviors or actions of the students that happened regularly.

The plan was to determine the problem and provide applicable solutions to support teachers in their behavior management strategies in the classroom and decrease student referrals and suspensions that were reported to the state of NC prior to this study. Those interventions were included in a desktop manual, which was a list of interventions that teachers could utilize in the classroom to be proactive rather than reactive and that would help them decrease usage of office referrals that led to school suspension.

Once the interventions were put in place, negative behaviors began to decrease. During interventions, there was not any out-of-school suspension. During the second month after the interventions' implementation, there were noticeable decreases in teacher write-ups and office referrals as well as no school suspensions. The fourth month data revealed that the behavior strategies were successful in reducing in-school suspensions. Teacher write-ups decreased from 95% to 75.25% by the fourth month. The students' loud outbursts decreased from 50% to 20%. Student office referrals decreased from 95% to 25% and did not lead to any school suspension. Students being off-task decreased from 70% to 40% and disruptive behavior decreased from 80% to 45%. The intervention helped ameliorate the teacher write-ups and the school suspensions.

## **Theory**

This study was grounded on a unique conceptual framework using social-behavior theory, prosocial behavior theory, and change theory to understand behavior modification in relationship to classroom management. Prosocial behavior theory is focused on the implementation of actions that motivate people to perform positively and that impact a community (Pam, 2017; Hutt, 2017). In the specific case of this study, the fact that students behaved better after teachers changed their way of addressing their disruptive behavior may have

impacted their families positively since students were not out of the school due to suspensions. Studies based on social behavior theory have shown the positive influence that classroom management, based on respect, discipline, and ongoing interaction on instructional matters, has on student behavior and achievement (Arndt, 2016; Hunt, 2010; Miller, 2007). This principle was partially evident in the results of this study since the way teachers addressed disruptive behaviors was based on the kind of interaction the social behavior theory postulates. However, since student achievement was not part of the study, the impact of the intervention cannot be extended to that area. Regarding the change theory, the results of the study show that negative behaviors were replaced, and a more positive environment emerged. This is congruent to other studies (Ayres, 2014; Menzies, 2011, Thomas et al., 2016).

The results of the study show that, once the classroom management weaknesses were identified and a tool to guide educators to apply the needed change was developed and implemented, teachers implemented the strategies and as a result students' negative behaviors changed. Therefore, this study used specific theories to investigate an educational problem and proved the positive impact of a teaching tool on solving the problem; closing the gap between theory and practice.

## **Methodology**

In order to achieve the purpose of the study, the following questions were formulated to guide this study:

How do fifth grade teachers describe their experiences with classroom management at an elementary school with high principal referral and suspension rates?

1. What classroom management strategies can fifth grade teachers at Public School 1 use to decrease principal referral and student suspension rates?

2. What behavioral techniques can be implemented to decrease behavioral problems at the fifth-grade level at Public School 1?
3. What can fifth grade educators do to bridge the gap between theory and practice in behavior management?

The study followed a qualitative action research design that provided an in-depth view of fifth grade students behaviors and their teachers' classroom behavior management and aligned with the theories selected to explain the research problem and support the appropriate application of an intervention that could foster positive classroom behavior changes. Action research was selected as an appropriate methodology because it integrates behavioral and organizational knowledge to solve real functioning problems of organizations (Coghlan, 2007) and allows to analyze and evaluate a problem, develop an intervention plan to address it, and then implement, monitor, and analyze the intervention to determine if the problem has been ameliorated (Creswell, 2008; Masters, 1995) .

As presented in Chapter 4, data was collected from each of the following sources: questionnaires administered to parents and teachers, office referrals (formal warnings), teacher write-ups (in-school suspensions), classroom observations, interviews, and previous records of out-of-school suspensions during the 2015–2016 academic year. As stated in Hildebrand and Arndt (2016), the use of interviews, teacher questionnaires, and classroom observation helps the researcher understand each educator's view of what classroom behavior management looks like. Due to that approach, the researcher was able to understand the perspective of each educator on discipline and what they understood to be misbehavior within the classroom. These elements coincide with the conceptual framework that deals with operant or voluntary measures that

manipulate the surrounding environment, which allows the researcher to interpret the nature of the problem and create a solution (NCSP, 2016).

From the gathered data, the schemes showed that the research problem was related to teachers' lack of training in classroom management methods. Basically, every indicator of the problem revolved around not knowing how to change the learning environment to fit the students' needs. Once the interventions were put in place, the negative behaviors began to decrease, teachers' morale got better, and their stress level decreased. During interventions, there was not any school suspension.

### **Discussion of the Results**

The analysis of the gathered data indicated a decrease in office referrals and teacher write-ups during and after the implementation of the research-based classroom management strategies included in the desktop manual. The results are also presented as answers to the research questions.

#### **How Teachers Describe Experiences**

*How do fifth-grade teachers describe their experiences with classroom management at an elementary school with high principal referral and suspension rates?*

Fifth grade teachers at Public School 1 describe their classroom room experiences through their formal experiences and perception. Perception and formal education were the two most common themes that all six teachers shared. Perception is how one views, understands, and interprets actions or information within their environment (Doll & Nickolite, 2008). In this study, the data revealed that all six teachers had a negative perception of their students' behavior and that they believed using teacher write-ups and office referrals would change their students' behavior. However, their perception of how to best manage misbehavior in a classroom were not

effective. Their perception on classroom management was incorrect since the problem did not diminish with those actions. The teachers lacked formal education in relation to classroom management and, therefore, did not know that it deals with not only the management of students' behavior but also the creation of an educational environment that fosters students' positive behaviors (Arnd t& Hildebrand 2016).

One teacher theme, in particular, a lack of formal education indicated that the teachers did not have formal training in behavior classroom management as Table 1 shows. Teacher themes confirmed that the teachers felt like their formal education did not prepare them for dealing with the kinds of behaviors students have these days. All six teachers believed that this generation of students are becoming more challenging than the previous generations of students and they do not have the respect that previous generations had. Each teacher expressed that they felt inadequate when their students misbehaved. One of them said, "I often asked myself 'am I doing the right thing' or 'am I making the students' behavior worse'?" Typically, the more experience one has, the more confident one feels; however, in this study all the teachers' themes on perception and formal education did not allude that more experience was a factor to consider. For example, two senior teachers said that at times they felt like they did not know what to do when students misbehave; therefore, they just wrote an office referral, so they could continue with the class.

Another theme was lack of support; the teacher felt like there was no other alternative to deal with misbehavior than sending the student to the principal, so they could be removed from the class or suspended. Four of the teachers said, "what options do we have if we don't write students up when they do not comply? We do not have any other options!" The lack of support affected the teachers' perception of their student behavior and how they view their own



environment. If teachers perceive lack of support, they may develop lack of motivation to perform their work and consequently they are not fully prepared to teach, affecting their performance. This was reflected in the results of the study since teacher preparedness (being ready to teach) was the third theme that all the teachers had in common. The preparedness refers to actions like having students unoccupied, no assignment ready, and no lesson plan posted. Teacher preparedness dealt with preparing the environment and making it conducive to learning.

The results of the analysis of the data indicated that all six teachers felt frustrated with students' continuous misbehavior. It was clear that all six teachers felt that students did not respect them and, therefore, became frustrated, stressed, and uncomfortable when students misbehaved. Besides that, teachers stated that it was unfair to have students who interrupted the learning of other students when there were students present that did want to learn.

### **Classroom Management Strategies**

*What classroom management strategies can fifth grade teachers at Public School 1 use to decrease principal referral and student suspension rates?*

Based on the data collected and analyzed during and after the interventions, there was a significant improvement in using of teacher write-ups, office referrals, and school suspensions as the only strategies to deal with students' misbehaviors. It was proven that the implementation of strategies included in the desktop manual, which included behavior and classroom management strategies that fifth grade teachers could use in their classrooms, helped to decrease the office referrals and teacher write-ups to decrease significantly as compared to previously years. The analysis showed that during the academic year 2015–2016, 1,000 students were suspended from the school for one to three days (North Carolina Public Schools, 2017). Short-term suspensions were issued for non-threatening, nonserious violations prior to interventions. During

interventions, there were not any out-of-school suspension. During the second month after the intervention's implementation, there were small noticeable positive changes. The fourth month data revealed that the behavior strategies were successful in reducing in-school suspension rates. The teachers' write-ups decreased from 95% to 75.25% by the fourth month. Student office referrals decreased from 95% to 25%. Normally office referral led to student suspensions; however, the office referrals decreased to 25% and they were not deemed worthy of suspension by the administrator.

### **Techniques Implemented to Decrease Behavior Problems**

*What behavioral techniques can be implemented to decrease behavioral problems at the fifth-grade level at Public School 1?*

Using the behavior management strategies that were explained in a desktop manual created a quick way for teachers be reminded of what can be implemented as classroom strategies to deal with students' misbehavior. Nickolite and Doll (2008) suggest that the classroom environment should be the initial focus on classroom management, prior to attempting to deal with any other concerns. Therefore, the first set of instructions in the manual was titled "prepare and set the classroom tone" and it required all six educators to make some adjustments to their classrooms. The first of those adjustments was that each teacher had to establish student generated classroom rules and post them. Establishing written rules provides the students with constant reminders of the educator's expectations (Nickolite & Doll, 2008).

The next behavioral technique implemented was the creation of a clean space, free of clutter, in order to provide a welcoming environment (Nickolite & Doll, 2008). This kind of environment motivates students to be in the educator's classroom. Among other actions suggested, there was the use of the wall space to promote students work since that would

motivate them to perform (McLeod, 2015). Posting students' work is part of providing positive reinforcement since it demonstrates to the students that their work has value. Every teacher of the study added a clock for marking transitional periods and they began giving an announcement stating when changing classes was close in order to help student transition and be prepared before the next class (McLauren & Nelson, 2009).

Fifth grade teachers also posted a reward system for positive behavior, and consequences for negative behavior on the wall as a constant reminder to the students. Students must constantly be reminded of the pros and cons of working and, when the educator is consistent with her discipline and has clear objectives, they are followed (McLeod, 2015). The fifth-grade educators also improved their environments by adjusting the thermostats to reflect 68–69 degrees in order to keep students cool and alert.

The educators worked on building relationships with the students and their families by opening lines of communication using calling, emailing, texting, and sending progress reports of good and bad behavior to parents and grandparents (Pitzer & Skinner, 2016). Grandparents were invited to volunteer within fifth grade classrooms. Every week a new grandparent came to help and support the educators. After all those actions were implemented, improvements began to really be noticed by the second month in the six main areas that emerged from the data (disruptive behavior, loud outburst, off-task, office referrals, training, and classroom preparedness).

### **Educators' Desktop Manual Usage**

Teachers used the desktop manual to address students' misbehavior. They utilized the section of the desktop manual called "classroom getting too loud / teacher needs to regain

control” when they first noticed that students were collectively getting loud; and they did it using the following course of action:

- Give me five (teacher raises his hand showing five fingers). This lets the students know that their attention is needed (Otten & Tuttle, 2010)
- Turn light off for five seconds. Turning the lights out makes students stop immediately (Perle, 2016)
- Prepare students for transitions and announce the class changes 5-7 prior to the main school bell ringing. This lets students know what to expect next (Nickolite & Doll, 2008)
- Began snapping fingers and have students to snap their fingers. This gets the students attention immediately (Otten & Tuttle, 2010)
- Have student write his/her name on board once their name been called. This gets the students attention (Otten & Tuttle, 2010)
- Ring cow bell or blow whistle to get the students attention. This lets the students know that their attention is needed immediately (Perle, 2016)
- Compliment the students who are exhibiting what was requested. This brings attention to what behavior is desired (McLead, 2014)
- Tell the students to “raise your hand if you want a one-on-one with the administrator. He will call your parent.” This is a quick warning of an office referral to the students (Pitzer & Skinner, 2016).

Teachers also used the section of the desktop manual that is focused on deescalating negative behavior before it exaggerated and might lead to an office referral. They got used to give three warnings before utilizing an office referral in contrast to the usual procedure of

immediately using a teacher write-up or office referral. The educators assigned seats based on performance, redirected by requesting a task (for example, “please tell me what the answer is or what are we working on?”), reminded students of parental agreement (“who wants me to call mom/dad grandmother/grandfather?”), called student by name, asked what classroom rule he/she was breaking, made student state the rule that he/she was breaking;. They also were attentive, walked around the room to look students working, requested a misbehaved student to remain after school one hour to work with the after-school teacher, and asked “who wants me to call their parents at work?”. These are simple strategies that set the path for the shift of the students’ behavior and the classroom tone. All these things, which are in fact positive reinforcement, worked together to change the students’ behavior.

### **Bridging the Gap**

*What can fifth-grade educators do to bridge the gap between theory and practice in behavior management?*

Data suggested that the educators never had had any formal training on classroom behavior management. There was only one educator who had one class on classroom behavior management and that educator received that basic training during the advanced education program while completing a Master of Education degree. It is evident from the data, and especially from the initial classroom observation, that the educators needed to feel comfortable handling classroom and behavior management. The researcher provided the educators with training on the desk top manual and discussed the methods with the educators. The Educators also studied the manual in their own private time so they could be very familiar with the methods. The educators used the desktop manual to guide them on how to deal with students’ misbehavior. The gap between theory and practice was closed for this group of fifth grade

teachers since they learned and applied based-research strategies. Such strategies proved to be successful to address the identified research problem. The researcher's main task was to provide them the information that was needed to improve their classroom management.

### **Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature**

A comprehensive literature review lays the groundwork for the development of a thoughtful, warranted, and timely scientific inquiry and puts the study into perspective by placing it within the context of the literature (Boote & Beile, 2005; Machi & McEvoy, 2009). The main focus of the literature review was to examine the research on classroom behavior and identify strategies and techniques that other researchers had used successfully to decrease students' negative behaviors and handle classroom management. Classroom behavior management strategies were explored so they could be implemented with the guidelines of the sources. Careful review of various sources helped find what had had successful rates in decreasing negative behavior and shifting classroom tones. Various researchers documented different things that affected behavior in the classroom and the researcher selected the techniques that best suited fifth grade students and teachers, based on the age brackets and previous study comparisons.

As referenced in Chapter 2, Rosenberg (2011) concluded that, when students do not have decent rest, they show misbehavior or have behavior problems. All 60 parents noted on the questionnaire that their children did not have any sleeping issues and most of the children went to bed between 8–9 pm on school nights. Rosenberg also mentions in her study that when children watch violent TV shows they tend to have behavioral problems; however, the parent questionnaire did not let the researcher determine whether it was true or not for the students who participated in the study because the term “violent” can vary from one parent to another, just like

the rating PG. Dobson (1970) concluded that the root of misbehavior esteems from the “slow learner”; however, that was not the case in this action research study. Out of 60 students, no one had an IEP nor did the parents or teacher mentioned on their questionnaires any mental illness or mental health concerns, and all the parents mentioned their children had seen a physician within a five to ten months’ time span. For the researcher, it was important to eliminate potential concerns as the professionals had suggested.

Pinkelman et al. (2015) suggest the use of a checklist while observing classrooms of students and the researcher used a checklist to identify the behavior, teacher responses, and the number of times prompting occurred. Information gathered from the checklists helped finding themes and identifying strategies to use or to avoid when planning for implementation and sustainability of a positive behavior intervention plan. Thomas et al. (2011) suggest that classroom climate can be changed and improved based on the teacher interactions. They also suggest the right interaction of the teacher can eliminate or reduce negative behaviors. The results of this study support that view because, when the teachers of the study provided positive responses and rewards for good behavior, students’ misbehavior decreased, and teachers’ write-ups and principal referrals decreased. When the teachers set the expectations with rules, rewards, and consequences, it provides a balance.

When the misbehavior decreased, teachers were less apt to write students up and they appeared to be less frustrated once the intervention was implemented. Ratcliff (2008) stated in a case study that teachers who reacted in frustration in an effort to control misbehavior unwittingly caused students’ misbehavior to increase. It was clear that the fifth-grade teachers lacked training in behavior management and, as referenced on the teacher questionnaires, needed to be educated in classroom management. Once the behavioral desktop manual was introduced during

the focus group, it helped the educators understand their alternates to writing students up. One of the teacher themes that emerged in this study was training. Schinedlheim (2010) explains that teachers need training on how to manage classroom behavior and the teachers in this action study stated on the questionnaire they lacked that training and experience. Schinedlheim concludes that, once the training takes place, there is a significant decrease in students' negative behavior and the researcher in this action research study shared the same experience after the implementation of the behavior management workshop.

In Chapter 2, behavior management is defined as the process that leads children to change their actions within an environment (Perle, 2016). One of the teacher themes that were identified was the classroom preparedness and, in this sense, the educators did not have rules, or a reward system posted. Some classrooms only had consequences and they were not clearly identified but demonstrated by means of school suspensions when undesired behavior surfaced. Students must have clear guidelines and expectations to know what they are dealing with. If they do not have them, behaviors like the ones that emerged as student themes (off-task, non-complaint behavior, and disruptive behavior) become constant in the classroom (Kamps et al., 2006; Oliver et al., 2011). One of the things included in the desktop manual used a teacher tool in this study was adding visual rules, a reward system, and consequences.

Positive reinforcement is used to encourage and motivate students to behave appropriately (Edrisinha et al., 2011; Shander-Reynolds, 2015; McLeod, 2015; NCSP, 2016) and it is behind "classroom behavior", which is another theme that emerged from the data collected in this study. It is focused on praising what the student is doing correctly/well and that it is rewarded when the actually desired behavior is being exhibited by the student. The goal is to be consistent with the rewards; once the desired behavior is exhibited, the student makes the connection of what the



desired behavior was. Rewards motives students to comply since, when the desired behavior is exhibited, a reward is given; which in turn stimulates the same behavior repeatedly. In a short period of time, the students work for the reward or the praise while the negative behavior is discouraged, as it was the case in this study.

### **Limitations**

This action research study had several limitations. One limitation was time. A longer time period would have allowed the researcher to further investigate teachers' responses and follow up periodically to determine whether teachers continued to implement the guidelines that they were given in the intervention. This study was conducted over a six-month timeframe, which proved to be a bit short. A timeframe of at least one year would have allowed the researcher to see what was done from the first day of school to the end of the school year. If this study would be duplicated, the suggestion would be to plan for two years. Two years would give more time for observations, and it would help the researcher to see what classrooms the students were in before, the type of learning environment the previous classroom had, and the students' behaviors and responses to their teachers' classroom management over a sustained period of time. Following the students from one grade level to the next would also permit the researcher to see if the student behaves or sets rules for himself /herself to abide, based on previous classroom experience. In other words, it would allow the researcher to see if students learned something from the interventions.

Increasing the timeframe would also permit the researcher enough time to see a greater number of educators working with the same students as well as hearing their experience with individual students. Doing so would let the researcher gather data to determine if a student behaves differently with different educators as well as the patterns that may emerge. Obtaining

additional data from students' previous teachers would also allow the researcher to know what strategies worked or did not work the previous year.

### **Implications of Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory**

Currently, there is a gap between theory and practice in the educational system in relation to the student models that educators learn about while they are in college and the students that are in the classrooms today (Carr, 2006). The societal trends have helped students' behavior change and no one can expect teachers to teach on the way they learned based on the old models because educators are not dealing with those types of students today. Educators are not being taught how to deal with the today's students; because of this some of the educator skills are outdated; especially handling the behavior of children. The students of today are more active, less attentive, more outspoken, and require more structure. What educators view as constant behavior problems are really the characteristics of the students today.

In the area of teaching practice, the behavior characteristics of today children must be addressed. In order to do this, educators must understand their students' mindset and adjust their classrooms based on it. Educators should understand the differences in students' family background and social economic status (McLean, 2014). Students are coming from more diverse backgrounds, which require the educators to be more patient and use consistent discipline. Based on the findings of this study, it is important to point out that understanding the students of today and learning how to adapt the classroom, based on their needs, are essential in the today classrooms.

Providing the educators with the tools to shift student's behavior may help decrease the stress levels of the teachers and possibly the number of office referrals and student suspensions (Shaw, 2016). Learning effective discipline techniques does help change the classroom tone,

keep a healthy staff morale, and diminish future teacher attrition (Bele et al., 2013). Once teachers learned how to effectively incorporate and apply classroom management, the focus can be centered on the students' learning (Webster, 2017).

The desktop manual developed in this study reminded the educators what to do when they saw a certain situation, behavior, or response. In doing so, the teachers' feeling that they were not in control of their classrooms and the consequent inadequacy was eliminated. Perhaps, the most beneficial part of its implementation was that the teacher felt less stressed and more empowered because they knew not only what to do when student misbehaved but also how to prevent minor infractions within the classrooms. Having the knowledge and the tools calls for success. Knowledge cannot be applied if it is unknown and sometimes knowledge is known, but it is not understood enough to be applied.

The outcome of this action research study resulted in no fifth-grade suspensions and a decrease in all six problem areas: office referrals, teacher write-ups, loud outbursts, students off-tasks, noncompliance and disruptive behavior. This implies that teachers' classrooms should be checked for preparedness on a weekly basis by an administrator or a mentor teacher. When teachers are unprepared, they create an environment for chaos and cause students to have idle time, which leads to opportunity to misbehave. Also, teachers that have more than two office referrals in a week need to be required to take a professional development workshop on classroom behavior management.

Regarding the implications of this study for educational policy, it seems that some policies about preparation of teachers in the classroom management area are advisable. This claim is congruent with what Freeman, Simonsen, Briere, and MacSuga-Gage (2014) pointed out in their review of state accreditation policy and teacher preparation programs. According to

them, the requirements asked for teacher training do not pay enough attention to the need of having effective classroom management skills. Consequently, many pre-service teachers have a lack of exposure to classroom management content and may not be prepared to effectively manage student behavior when they finish their teacher preparation programs.

The results of the study can also be considered evidence to support the claim that negative behavior can be changed in classroom contexts as the social behavior theory, prosocial behavior theory, and the change theory (discussed in Chapter 2) postulate, and that such a change needs to be focused on positive reinforcement (Edrisinha et al., 2011; Shander-Reynolds, 2015; McLeod, 2015; NCSP, 2016). Understanding the impact of utilizing social behavior theory, prosocial behavior theory, and change theory, can create a dynamic change in students' behavior in the classroom. It was imperative for the researcher to help the educators understand the dynamics of low socio economic backgrounds and how it affects student's behavior. Students from low social economic backgrounds did not hinder students from adapting to positive changes within the classroom, it just meant the students needed more consistency and structure within the classroom. The evidence of this study clearly demonstrated that when educators understood the students' social backgrounds the educators were able to address the needs of the students individually and collectively in order to produce a conducive prosocial environment.

The student's social backgrounds gave the researcher an idea of what type of prosocial behavior concerns that the students may have. The low socio-economic status did not keep the students from exhibiting the change theory, once positive reinforcing was being utilized it helped encouraged the desired behavior change. From this study the researcher has demonstrated that low socio economic status does not limit student's ability to activate change theory, it just means

that there are other prosocial behaviors that may need changing and requires positive reinforcement in order to see desired prosocial behavior changes.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

After completion of this action research study, it was obvious that there were several other factors to consider when trying to ameliorate school suspensions or improvement in student behavior. The researcher believes that classroom management should be a collective effort among the entire school. Making the behavior management model consistent throughout the school would promote teacher support and students would have clearer expectations in all grades. With enough time, the gap between theory and practice will be closed and the one between the educational system and the student models that educators learn in college. The trends of society have caused that students' behavior changes; no one can expect teachers to teach following the classroom management model they have inferred based on old models of students' behavior because educators are not dealing with those types of students today.

Therefore, future research may include the following:

1. Expand the current study's population to include any age range of students to increase the spectrum of student sample. There could be a larger spread in age of students ranging from K-6. Perhaps utilizing two different schools in the same county with the same age ranges would also help determine if some classroom issues are universal or isolated issues.
2. Extend the length of the action research project to increase the amount of data on students' behavior and teachers' classroom behavior management strategies. It would also show which strategy is the most effective over a year and the researcher could see if the changes could carry over to the next grade level.

3. Focusing the current study only on fifth graders limited the population of educators.

Opening the current study to other educators who feel they have classroom behavior problems would present other views of what they deem as misbehavior and also more diversity in educators' experience with classroom management.

4. Expand the research to the entire school and have more than one researcher to cover each classroom if students exhibiting behavior problems or high suspension rate is a school wide problem.

### **Conclusion**

It is important for educators of today to understand their students. The students that educators learned about at college are not the ones they encounter when they become employed at the local school system. Therefore, the strategies that they learned in college 10–15 years ago will not work for the students of today. The generation that baby boomers produced is no longer in schools today. Educators are dealing with the new millennial generation and they cannot use the same strategies from the baby boomer generation. The students of today are more technical, less attentive, and more active. Therefore, the educators of the fifth grade of Public School 1 did not know what to do with those new students and they felt obliged to use write-ups, office referrals, and suspensions as an attempt to correct undesired behavior. This practice alone demonstrates that there is a gap between theory and practice.

This action research found six main problematic areas that were causing the teacher write-ups, office referrals, and suspensions. The six areas that emerged from data were: disruptive behavior, loud outbursts, off-task, office referrals, training, and classroom preparedness. Once the problem was identified, the researcher began to assist the fifth-grade educators in implementing behavior and classroom strategies that were put in a desktop manual

for teachers' easy access. After the implementation of those strategies, there were not any school suspension. During the second month after the intervention's implementation, there were noticeable changes. The fourth month data revealed that the behavior strategies were successful in reducing in-school suspensions, decreasing the teacher writes- ups, students' loud outbursts, office referrals, students being off-task, and disruptive behavior.

Fifth grade educators bridged the gap between theory and practice in behavior management by obtaining proper training. They learned how to prevent, deescalate behavioral problems, and eliminate excessive teacher write-ups that led to school suspensions. Educators were provided with the tools needed to understand and have a working knowledge of how to change and shape student behavior, providing them a response for learners to perform, be accolades, and validate, reassure, and affirm them (NCSP, 2016). Once the educators were given the knowledge and the tools needed, the fifth-grade educators' experiences changed from feeling uncomfortable, stressed, and inadequate to being comfortable and confident when handling students at a school with a high suspension rate. It is concluded that the gap was closed based on an outcome of no suspensions and a decrease in all six problematic areas.

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### **Appendix A: Focus Group C**

1. How would you describe your classroom management experiences at this school?
2. How would you describe disruptive behavior in your classroom?
3. How would you describe how you engage students that demonstrate disruptive behavior? How do you manage these behaviors?
4. How comfortable do you do feel while you intervene with student who displays disruptive behavior?
5. What are the main challenges you confront when dealing with disruptive behavior?
6. How often do you send children to in -school suspension in 30 days?
7. What is your main method of classroom management?

## **Appendix B: Demographic Questionnaire**

1. What grade levels have you taught?
2. How long have you been teaching?
3. Did you take a class on classroom behavior management? If so, how many classes?
4. Are you a mentor teacher?
5. Do you have a mentor teacher?
6. What areas are you certified to teach?
7. What is your educational background?
8. How did you obtain your initial license to teach?
9. Do you think you could benefit from more training in classroom behavior management?

### **Appendix C: Letter of Explanation for Parents**

Greetings Parents,

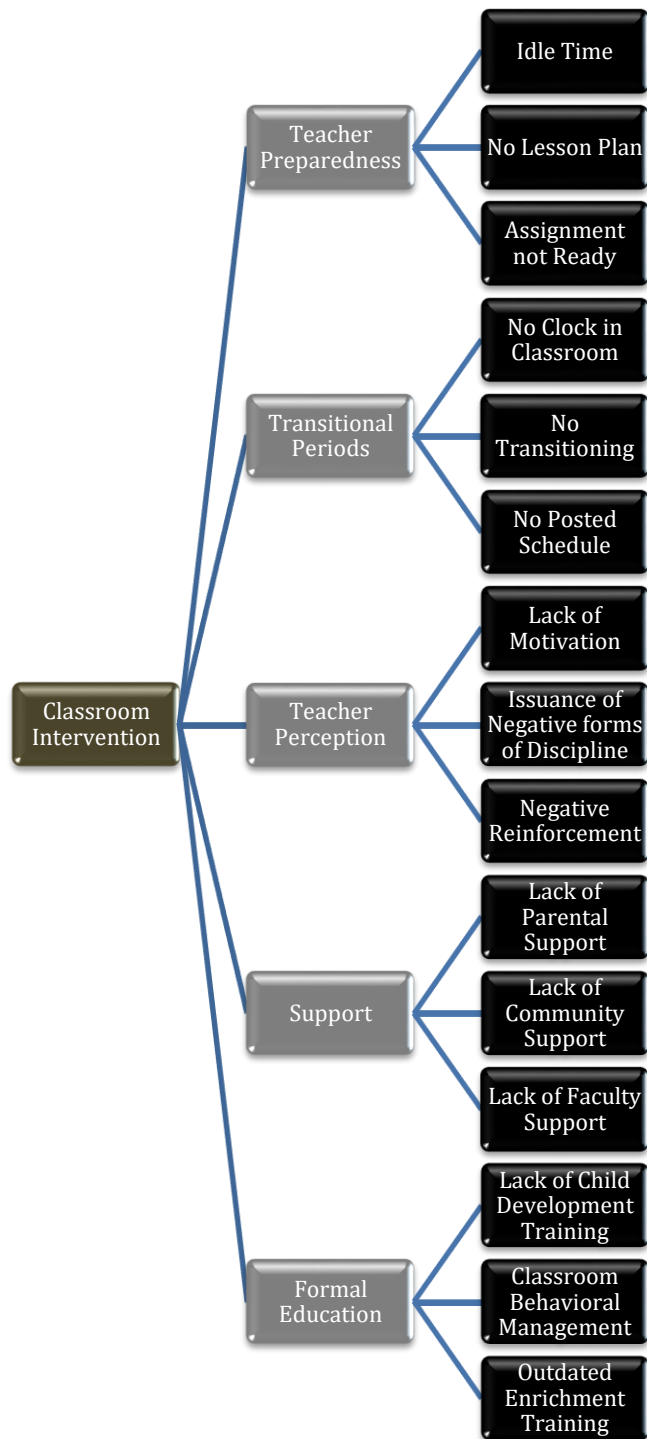
My name is Yvonne Bell and I am a doctoral candidate at Concordia University of Oregon, and I am in the process of fulfilling my dissertation study. This study will use an Action Research model to investigate classroom behavior and strategies by setting up a baseline using absentee patterns, in-school suspension totals, and investigate the causes of students' suspension. All parents/ guardians that want to participate in the study will receive an anonymous questionnaire to provide background data. The non-identifiable questions were developed to help bridge the gap between home and school. The researcher is interested in understanding patterns of behavior in the home as well as concerns of parents. My main objective is to come up with interventions to help decrease behavioral referrals and school suspensions problems. This will not take much of your time.

Sincerely,

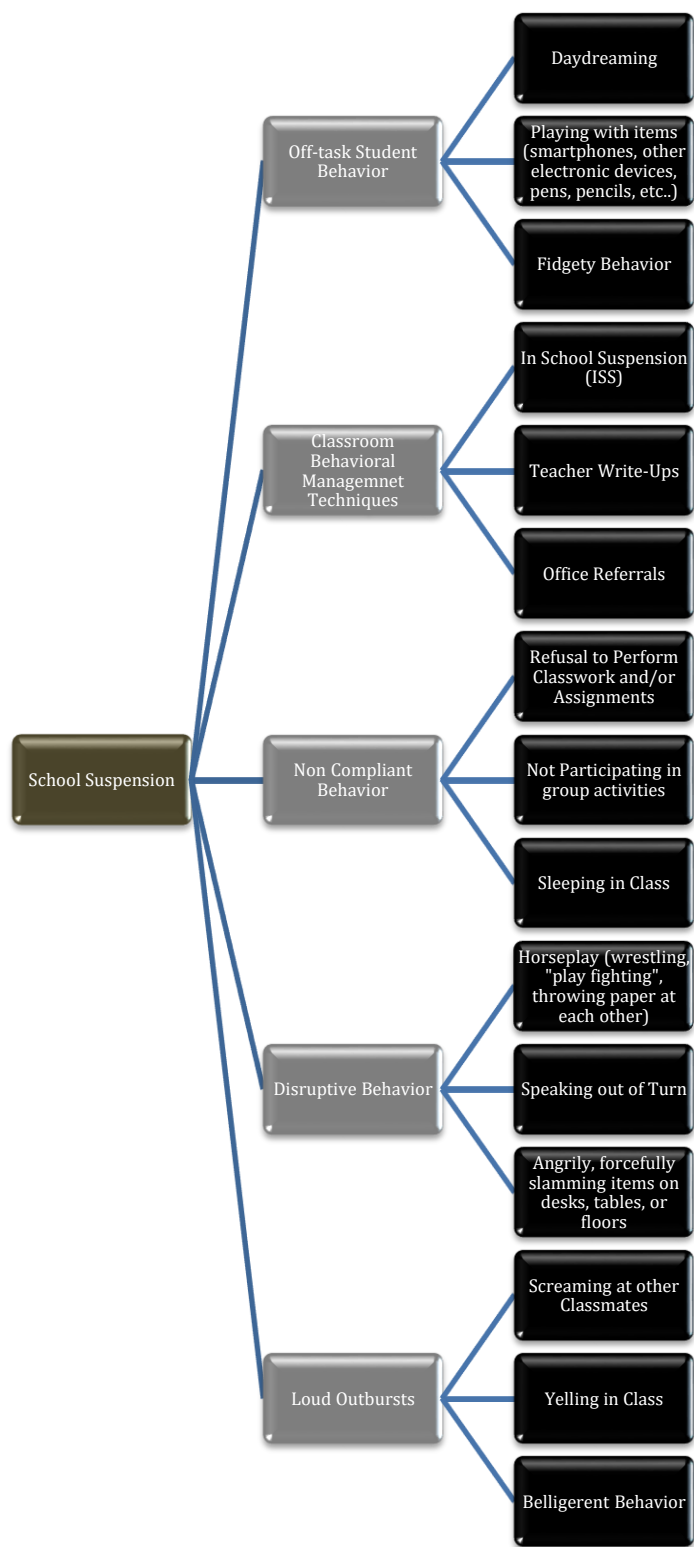
Yvonne Bell M. Ed



## Appendix D: Teacher Themes



## Appendix E: Student Themes



## **Appendix F: Desktop Manual**

The following actions have been proved to help teachers improve their classroom management. Read them carefully, reflect upon them, discuss their implementation with your peers, and try them in your daily teaching. Feel free to ask the researcher for guidance.

### **1. Prepare, set the classroom tone...**

- a. Establish student generated classroom and post classroom rules and keep them simple
- b. Create clean space and uncluttered walkways (creating a welcoming environment)
- c. Utilize positive quotes, and bright colors and lighting
- d. Utilize wall space to show students work off (encouragement to perform)
- e. Post reward system along with consequences
- f. Post a classroom schedule that includes beginning and ending activities
- g. Post a clock on the center wall of the room
- h. Give a 7 min announcement of classes getting ready to change or a transitional phrase/bell before the actual bell
- i. Cool classroom to keep students awake/attentive (approx. at 68-69degrees)
- j. Have a quick assignment (2-5mins) ready to gets students seated and settled
- k. Open up parent communications to grandparents as well in order to improve support
- l. Establish parent/grandparent involvement by multiple ways of communication such as auto texting, emailing, letters, invitations, good/bad progress reports

### **2. Classroom getting to loud or teacher needs to regain control**

- a. Tell them "Give me 5" and raise your hand showing 5 fingers up
- b. Turn lights off for 5 seconds and announce transition
- c. Begin snapping fingers and have students to snap fingers too
- d. Have student write his/her name on board once their name has been called
- e. Ring cow bell or blow whistle
- f. Compliment the students who are exhibiting what was requested
- g. Tell them "Raise your hand if you want a one-on-one with the administrator while he calls your parent"

### **3. For Students that are off-task**

- a. Call students' full name out
- b. Recite instructions
- c. Assigned students that are easily off-task to seats/places in the front of class
- d. Redirect them by requesting a task (e.g. "Please tell me what the answer is" or "what are we working on")
- e. Redirect them with a compliment (e.g. "I like when you...")
- f. Remind students of parental agreement (e.g. "Who wants me to call mom/dad /grand-mother /granddad"; "Who wants me to call their parent at work?")
- g. Call students by name and ask, "what classroom room rule are you breaking?"
- h. Have students state the classroom rule(s)

- i. Be attentive, walking around room and looking at students
- j. Request students remain after school one hour to work with after school teacher

## **Appendix G: Statement of Original Work**

The Concordia University Doctor of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously- researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

### **Statement of academic integrity.**

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

### **Explanations:**

#### ***What does “fraudulent” mean?***

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

#### ***What is “unauthorized” assistance?***

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

### Statement of Original Work (Continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
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